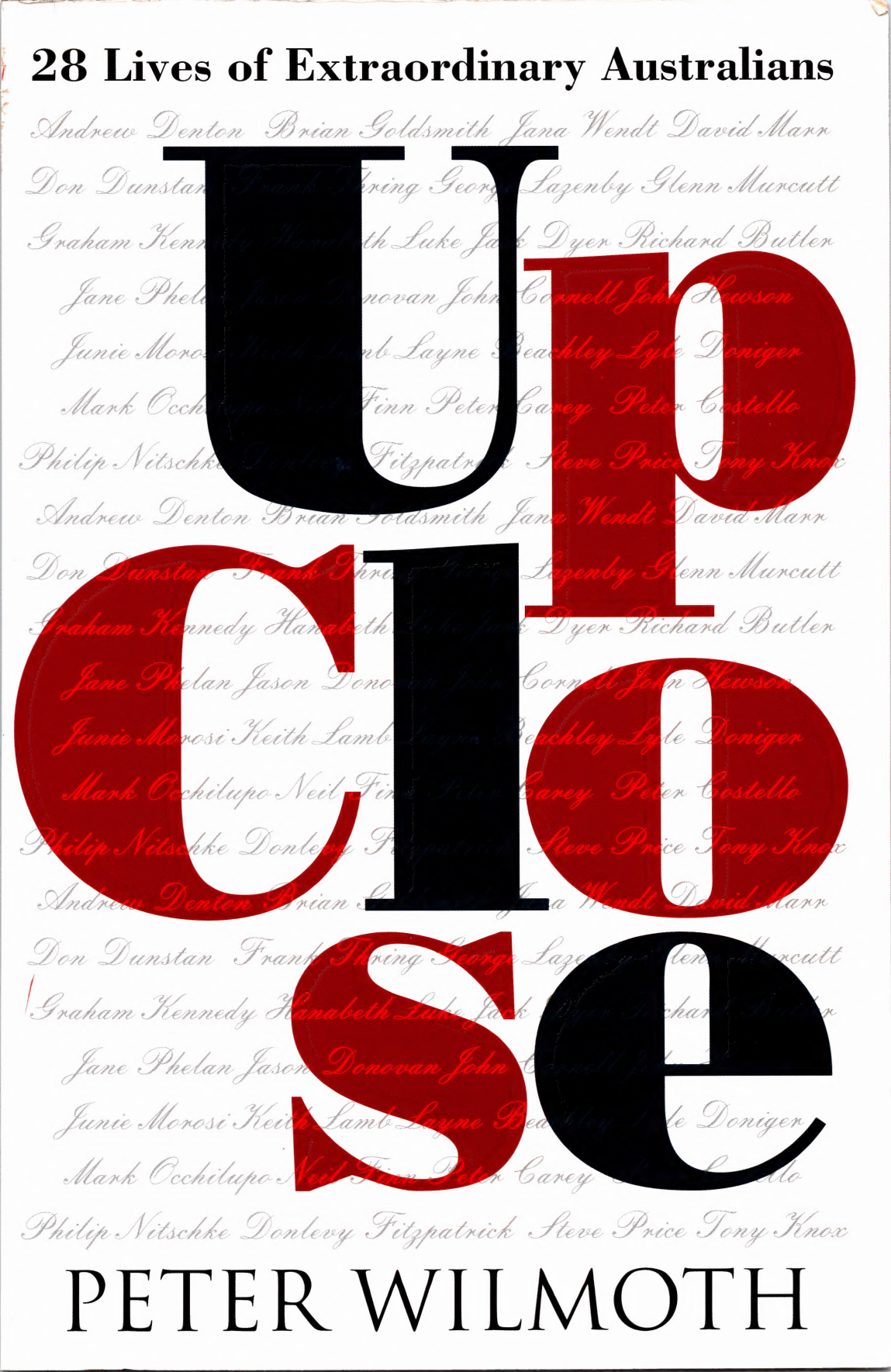
## 28 Lives of Extraordinary Australians




PETER WILMOTH

Since 1979, Peter Wilmoth has been a journalist at *The Age*, where he has written about television, film, sport, music and the media. He has worked as a writer for the music program *Nightmoves*, is the author of the 1993 book *Glad All Over, The Countdown Years 1974-1987* and co-author of *Bud: A Life*, the 2004 autobiography of Charles 'Bud' Tingwell. He is married with two children and lives in Melbourne.

# Up Close

## 28 Lives of Extraordinary Australians

PETER WILMOTH

MACMILLAN
Pan Macmillan Australia

First published in 2005 in Macmillan by Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Ltd
St Martins Tower, 31 Market Street, Sydney

Copyright © Peter Wilmoth 2005

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Wilmoth, Peter, 1960– .
Up close: 28 lives of extraordinary Australians.

ISBN 1 4050 3657 5.

1. Australia – Biography. I. Title.

920.094

Typeset in 12/16 pt Janson by Post Pre-press Group, Brisbane
Printed in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group

Papers used by Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Ltd are natural, recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The manufacturing processes conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

# Contents


| | |
|---|---|
| Preface | vii |
| Hanabeth Luke | 1 |
| Brian Goldsmith | 12 |
| David Marr | 26 |
| Glenn Murcutt | 38 |
| Frank Thring | 50 |
| Don Dunstan | 57 |
| George Lazenby | 67 |
| Jack Dyer | 78 |
| Graham Kennedy | 88 |
| Jana Wendt | 100 |
| John Cornell | 112 |
| Jane Phelan | 123 |
| Jason Donovan | 135 |

Andrew Denton 147
John Hewson 156
Junie Morosi 169
Keith Lamb 181
Layne Beachley 190
Lyle Doniger 201
Neil Finn 216
Mark Occhilupo 227
Peter Carey 237
Donlevy Fitzpatrick 245
Peter Costello 255
Philip Nitschke 267
Richard Butler 276
Steve Price 292
Tony Knox 300

# Preface

Writing a piece about someone's life that succeeds in allowing the reader more than a glimpse is mainly about access. The more, the better. Sometimes you are allotted a strict hour with no further opportunities to put flesh on the bones. No, you can't go to their house, or walk around their local park, or travel out of the city with them. You can just turn up at a neutral venue with your tape-recorder and press the record button. In these circumstances you do what you can within the time and geographical constraints. There are no hints at the subject's personality that you might glean from a bookshelf or a living room or a garden. You work with the words that come out of the subject's mouth. And those of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and critics.

Sometimes you are allowed into someone's life to a degree

that is rewarding and, it must be said, surprising. In Sydney, I interviewed John Hewson in his office. It was like any other corporate environment, and Hewson, at first, seemed just as dry as his reputation. And then, when the interview ended, I asked whether he was free for a drink or dinner. 'Come on, let's go for a drive.' We got into his old Mercedes and drove through peak-hour Sydney. Hewson talked and talked, told jokes, pointed out the sights of his city and offered to take me through the house he and his wife, Carolyn, had spent three years renovating. It emerged he and Carolyn had split, but Hewson was still happy to show me, with great pride, every room of this unfinished mansion. I'm not sure whether the fact that the Hewson family would probably never live there made this guided tour more or less strange. Afterwards, in a revealing moment he peeled the cover off a beautiful old MG car: the passion of John Hewson. When we left, Hewson said he already had dinner plans but why didn't we get a drink at a pub? So we sat in an olde English pub and Hewson talked some more. A man greeted him loudly at the bar, saying, 'What are you doing in this den of iniquity?'

It was Hewson unbuttoned, exactly what I'd hoped to see, and it was about as good as a four-hour interview gets. This is when interviews get interesting. This is where you get the mask down, the unguarded comment, the human being away from the protective layers of a publicist, and exposed to the vagaries of other human beings (well-known people interacting with the public is always interesting, and sometimes telling, to witness).

Jason Donovan invited me into his flat, we hung out on Campbell Parade, we went to a cafe in Bondi and had a fruit juice with his girlfriend. For someone who'd been suspicious of and at one stage litigious against the media (he once successfully sued *The Face* magazine and won substantial damages which he refused) the guard was decidedly down.

Frank Thring reluctantly agreed to be interviewed at his small Fitzroy cottage, and I'm glad he did because it allowed some precious time with the king in his domain.

I had lunch with Tony Knox at his sister-in-law's pub. Afterwards, we drove over to his rented room in a former school in Brunswick, where he showed me the space in which he lives, with its piano, books, LP records and portrait of Mietta O'Donnell, his partner of 30 years who three years earlier had died in the car Tony was driving. These are revealing moments.

Don Dunstan invited me on a tour around his magnificent high-walled garden in Norwood, South Australia, and, as Dunstan lovingly pointed out plants he'd nurtured, I think I got closer to an understanding of the man than I would have from any quote on a tape.

John Cornell gave me an afternoon at his pub in Byron Bay, introduced me to his wife, Delvene Delaney, and allowed me an insight into his fragrant, privileged world (while the photographer and I stood there, Cornell farewelled Delaney with a loving embrace and a kiss).

What has always struck me about interviewing is how quickly you get an idea of who someone is. From a handshake at a door to intimate conversation in just two hours. It's amazing how often and how quickly the walls come down. I think it's because people are rarely, if ever, asked for the minute details of their lives. Maybe they find it flattering, tempting and horrifying in equal measure. In the end, of course, it's a strange relationship. Spending an hour or two with someone isn't knowing that person, it's just a glimpse. But the often intense focus of an interview can produce gems and reveal extraordinary stories.

Sometimes, despite the professional requirements of guiding an interview, not to mention making sure the tape's working, a subject's story can be amazing to sit and listen to.

After an intense interview around her kitchen table in the house she shared with other students, I walked with Hanabeth Luke on an almost empty beach in northern New South Wales and we talked about her plans and hopes, which involved writing, photography and the environment. Hanabeth had been in the Sari Club in Bali when the bomb went off in 2002, and she was photographed helping a young man away from the carnage (he later died). She had become famous for the worst reasons, and a symbol of the human capacity for practicality and kindness in the flames of hell. But that day, as we walked in the afternoon sun, she was also a young university student talking about surfing and laughing about kitsch '70s LPs.

Listening to other people's stories is the great privilege of a journalist's job. I remember being deeply moved listening to champion surfer Layne Beachley speak about her search for her birth mother and the sensitivities involved after she'd found her. When you meet someone as impressive and articulate as Beachley, your job as an interviewer becomes easier. You just sit and listen, and occasionally ask a question.

Lyle Doniger held back nothing as he told his story of spending six years in a Bangkok jail. I sat there in the backyard of a relative of Lyle's and listened. Luckily for me, Lyle had a brilliant eye for detail and a storyteller's gift.

The relationship between an interviewer and his or her subject is a forced one. You have a job to do. They have a story to tell. Your job is to find that story, to tease it out, to encourage the telling, to get to a truth beyond predictability or cliché. Sometimes their job is to obfuscate, to omit, to present a version of themselves they find satisfying. This is a natural desire, of course. But usually it doesn't make much of a story. The result you often get is a compromise between these two ideals. You have delved and found some detail or perspective that gives a piece oxygen; they have been honest and open

enough for you to be able to write a piece that stands apart from a cursory newspaper article and holds the reader. Sometimes they have surprised themselves at how open they were and how much they preferred a full-blooded account to the PR version. They may read back the finished product with one eye closed, but at least it's a real article and not something their publicity department might have written for them.

The other challenges of this type of work happen long after the interview has finished. It's shoe-horning someone's life onto a page, to a deadline. I've been lucky in having good space to work with. But always so much is left out. A writer assesses, edits, chooses, reports what goes on in front of his or her eyes. It's subjective. Whether this process is successful is hard to say.

I don't know what some of the people I've interviewed have thought of these pieces, because usually I don't hear from them. John Hewson apparently told those close to him the article was 'all right', even though he informed me he never reads articles about himself, and wouldn't be reading this one. While I was writing my piece on former Tasmanian Governor Richard Butler, his solicitor sent a letter warning me about how I should be treating the material from my interview, but I heard nothing afterwards from either Butler or his lawyer.

I am privileged to have spent a professional life sitting in on other people's lives, asking questions that were sometimes impertinent, personal and often uncomfortable. I'm grateful to the people in this book for letting me into their lives, however briefly. I would like to thank the editors who have overseen these interviews, especially at *The Sunday Age*, under whose auspices most of these pieces were written: Bruce Guthrie, Garry Linnell, Jill Baker, Ken Merrigan, Steve Foley, Malcolm Schmidkte, Alan Oakley and Sally Robinson. I would like to thank Anita Scalzo in *The Age* library for technical help and

Johanna Waldon for administrative support. Also in the library, thanks to Frank Prain, John Langdon, Michelle Stillman, Susan Phillips, Maria Paget, Marian Crawford, Kait Jordon, Sarah Van Straalen, Dana Topchian, Theresa Ambrose and Monica Simpson for their help in my preparation of these articles. Finally, thanks to Tom Gilliatt at Pan Macmillan for his enthusiasm for this book, to Sarina Rowell for her tireless efforts and ongoing encouragement during the editing process and to Jane Heslop for her efforts at publicising it. I thank *The Age* for their support with this book; particularly Editor-in-Chief of *The Age*, Andrew Jaspan. And finally, thanks to my family for all their support.

Peter Wilmoth, February 2005

# Hanabeth Luke

It's like any happy, cruisey student house. In the loungeroom a handful of LPs are propped up against a bookshelf, from The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* to *Sesame Street Fever*, with Grover playing the John Travolta white-suit role. There are books – on ecology, biology and Nat Young's *The History of Surfing*. The afternoon sun gives the little cottage in this quiet coastal town a beautiful late-winter glow.

There's a guitar in the corner. It's the one Hanabeth Luke and her boyfriend, Marc Gajardo, used to play during the two-and-a-half years they lived together, before the bomb at the Sari Club killed him nearly a year ago. 'Marc and I used to play guitar to The Beatles,' she says.

There's a radiance, poise and a joyfulness about Hanabeth that may well stem from the teenage years she spent living in

nearby Byron Bay. Wherever it's from, it must have come in useful as a coping strategy during the darkest days of last October.

She brings out a photo album. In it are pictures of the couple's holiday in the days leading up to 12 October. Hanabeth, then 22, and Marc, a 30-year-old mechanic from Hanabeth's home county of Cornwall in England, look tanned and happy, hanging out like any young couple with a mutual love of surfing and guitars.

And a love of Bali, this magical island Hanabeth had visited 23 times, the first when she was six months old. Her mother went to Bali to source jewellery she would sell in Australia. 'Bali was my third home,' Hanabeth says.

The only clue to the pain Hanabeth has endured for 12 months is a scrapbook of press cuttings about the Bali bombs. She opens a *Time* magazine to the photo that was flashed around the world. Just moments after the bomb ripped through the Sari Club, Hanabeth, wearing shorts and singlet, was photographed helping a badly wounded young man away from the flames.

The photograph encapsulated the instinctive humanity that persists even in the white heat of catastrophe. It became the key image of the tragedy, and it made Hanabeth Luke famous. It also gave her a voice, which she later used to confront Tony Blair about the wisdom of war on Iraq.

But on the evening of Saturday, 12 October, as she and Marc played guitar on the balcony of a friend's Kuta *losman* (guesthouse), becoming the face or voice of anything was a long way from Hanabeth Luke's mind. Just back from a tiring trip to the north of the island, and with an early-morning surf planned, all she wanted was a quiet night. Until her friends talked her into going to the Sari Club for a dance.

* * *

Around Cornwall, on England's south-west peninsula, the water is icy enough for local surfers to require industrial-strength wetsuits and a cavalier attitude to life. But having the best waves in Britain makes the effort worthwhile for Cornwall's large surfing community, of which Hanabeth Luke and Marc Gajardo were a part. They met in 'the scene'. Marc, a long-boarder, rode the Malibu-style 'planks', with Hanabeth on her smaller 'performance' board.

After a visit to friends and family in Cornwall, they were heading back to Byron Bay, where Hanabeth had lived since she was 16 and where she and Marc shared a house not far from where her parents had settled after emigrating from Britain in the mid-1990s.

Maybe it was the memory of Cornwall's cold water that made stopping in Bali seem like a good idea. It was certainly a chance to break up a long flight. And it gave the couple a chance to kick back before returning to the real world of her environmental science degree and a job waiting for Marc at a Byron workshop.

On 12 October, they'd been in Bali for 10 days. Several friends arrived at the Sari Club at 10.30 p.m., having had dinner at a place across the road. The Sari, as many Australians know, was a good meeting spot because its two letters, 'SC', stood out clearly among the low-rise neons around a central intersection known as Bemo Corner. And while you were meeting, you might as well have a Bintang beer or a shot of *arak*, the eye-watering local poison. And, if you could stand the Top 40 stuff they'd pump out, have a quick dance, too. 'The music there was terrible, this cheesy nightclub,' Hanabeth says, 'which is half the fun of it.'

Hanabeth and Marc were on the dance floor, but Marc was 'sort of shaking his head in embarrassment, still dancing away'. Cher's song 'Believe' came on, which tipped the balance

for Marc. He said, 'I've got some pride, guys,' and walked away.

Hanabeth and her friend Melanie moved to the back of the Sari's front dance floor to get some relief from the growing crowd. It was then that Hanabeth heard an explosion, which was the bomb over the road at Paddy's Bar.

'I'd never heard that noise before,' Hanabeth says now. 'So running through my head in that split second was a petrol tank or a shotgun, although I laughed that off. I've never heard a shotgun in Bali before. Or anywhere. Then I thought it was some sort of party cracker.'

Hanabeth was slightly alarmed. She remembers everyone in the club sort of pausing for a moment. 'You could see everyone going, "That was a bit strange." Then everyone went "Naaah" and carried on dancing. A couple of people at this point would have wandered out to see what it was. Marc was particularly inquisitive, so maybe at that point he did.'

Seconds later, a pressure wave from the first bomb moved through the Sari. 'At that point I stopped and I was thinking, "That was really strange." The air just, whoosh. I remember thinking, "After this song's over, I'm going to go out and have a look. I'm not going to panic, but that was really unnerving."'

And then the second bomb went off.

'It was pressure and power and noise and heat all at once. I was thrown up in the air and landed on the ground. The whole place was flattened by that initial impact and then the roof came down milliseconds after.'

Hanabeth found herself underneath some rubble. 'I had to really pull myself out from underneath something. It was black, the power had gone. There was an eerie second where there was no noise at all. Then everyone started yelling.

'I wondered whether I was still alive. For that second when I was underneath the rubble I had almost already accepted I

was, oh well, my God, I'm dying. That's a shame. I wasn't ready for that. Then I went, "Hang on a minute," snapped out of it and thought, "If there's any way of getting out of this, I'm going to find it." That kicked in within a second. It was fight or flight. I just ran away from where the blast had been. Fires were starting everywhere. The front of the building was on fire so you couldn't go forward. There was every chance there could have been another bomb. Plus there was all the *arak* in there. As far as we knew, World War III had started. We hadn't watched the news for a day or two; you never know. It could easily have been the start of a series of bombs.'

Using electrical wire exposed by the blast, Hanabeth climbed through the broken roof and over a four-metre wall. Apart from some grazes and a sore back, she was uninjured. 'I think I was one of the first people to get out of there. I just bolted. There was a stairway and people were going up and men were helping people over the wall. I remember thinking, "I'm able-bodied enough, I'm not waiting for anyone."'

She couldn't see Marc behind her, so she started making her way to the front of the club to see if he was there. It was now three minutes after the explosion. And that's when she saw Tom Singer, the young man in the photograph.

'I thought, Christ, that's an injured person. It was so black, I could hardly see a thing except the flames. He was calling out gently, not in a very good state. I asked him if he could walk and he said no. I said, "I don't care if you can walk or not, you have to stand up now because if you don't you're not going to make it at all. So I'll help you as much as I can." So I picked him up and pulled him away.'

Hanabeth took Tom clear of the flames and a couple of people took over. By this stage she was beginning to lose a sense of reason. 'My state of mind had gone to pieces, really. All my focus was on finding Marc. I found Mel, who I'd been

dancing with, and she was looking after Tom. We all helped move him into a taxi to go to the hospital.'

Hanabeth was still trying to get to the front of the club. 'In a way, Tom Singer may have saved my life because there were still petrol tanks going up all over the shop. In my state of mind I probably would have gone to the front of the club if I could have, and that was where the worst of the bloodshed would have been. So I'm kind of thankful that I didn't have to see all that as well.'

Hanabeth searched for Marc for the next hour. She kept trying to get to the front of the club, but Melanie kept physically holding her back. 'I think I even tried to climb the roof again. I was going ballistic. I had to get back in there.'

She spent the next four hours going around hospitals looking for Marc. 'I was looking at very, very horribly injured people and trying to figure out whether that's the one person you love the most in the whole world.' A group of Germans also couldn't find their friends. Hanabeth went back with them to their *losman*, a 20-minute drive from Kuta.

She had a shower and changed clothes. 'I was in massive shock. I was very, very, very worried. All I wanted to know was where Marc was.'

She rang the *losman* where she'd been staying. No one had seen Marc. She was able to speak to her other friends. 'I hadn't even thought to tell people I was all right, my other friends were going spare because they were worried about me.'

She rang her parents in Byron Bay. 'Dad says he'll never forget the words. I said, "It's Hanabeth, there's been a bomb, I'm OK, Marc's missing." Pretty simple, really. I didn't contact Marc's parents at that point because I didn't know anything.'

At sunrise Hanabeth got a lift to Kuta. At 8 a.m., Hanabeth's friend found Marc's body at a hospital. 'Then I rang Marc's parents. That was the worst part, beyond anything else.'

Hanabeth spent the next three days in Bali. Her boyfriend was one of the first British victims identified, but it took two months before his body could be flown back to England. The wait was more torture. 'It was utterly unbelievable that they could take that long, especially as he was identified. To me it was a terrible case of red tape. I understand they need to be sure, but Bobbie [a friend] went in there five times.

'It was a combination of the Indonesians' general disorganisation and the Australians' general need for every little thing to be done by the book. And the combination made for a long, drawn-out process. It put Marc's parents through a lot of pain they could have done without.' For the families of victims waiting for identification and a funeral, it was 'absolute torture'.

Hanabeth travelled to Cornwall to be with Marc's parents, with whom she was close. She stayed three months there, spending her days walking the cliffs and surfing. A friend suggested she organise a surf contest as a fundraiser. 'The whole surfing community pulled together for it. We raised $12,000, which went to the Rotary Club in Bali,' Hanabeth says.

Hanabeth came home to Byron Bay and tried to rebuild her life. With war on Iraq looming, she was invited to London to appear with 17 other women in a televised debate with British Prime Minister Tony Blair. She accepted.

She thought a war on Iraq would be futile and possibly cause more of the sort of violence she'd witnessed. She wanted to convey to Blair some of the pain she had been through. Maybe, she thought, that would make him less certain of his resolve. 'The grief alone was enough to make me feel very strongly,' she says. 'Having been through something so terrible so close to home, I knew what it was like in my heart, and I really felt for people who might have the same feelings. I was so sensitive to other people experiencing bombs and war. It made me cry just thinking about it.'

She knew that the famous photo had given the media a 'hook', and that she now had a platform. She didn't want to waste it. She told Blair she was worried war would provoke more terrorist attacks and pleaded with him not to put anyone else through what she and Marc's family had suffered.

Blair told her, 'There's nothing I can say to take away the pain that you feel in this situation, but the reason why I'm taking this action is that my worry is if the terrorists are able to get hold of even worse material than they used [in Bali].'

Hanabeth's confrontation with Blair was screened across Britain and Australia. Again, she was on the front pages. 'I felt very honoured to be able to speak words that so many people that I know felt weren't being heard.'

Blair, she remembers, 'seemed very genuine that he felt what he was doing was the right thing'. 'I've never had anything against Tony Blair, I have respect for him, but I really felt that what he was doing was wrong. He got lost for words at one point, which was unheard of for such an experienced public speaker. I think it might be a bit big-headed to say that maybe I could have changed the way he thought just for a second.

'You've got to give any man a lot of credit who's going to take on 18 women in front of the international media. Perhaps he believed if he could convince these 18 women, or at least some of them, then maybe he'd have a chance of convincing the country. He was probably a bit surprised at the force of what me and the other women were saying.'

Now the war is officially over, has she changed her stance? 'I don't see what it has achieved, to be honest. The challenge is to try to treat the causes of terrorism, which is the anger and hatred against us. Some of the extremists, of course, you can't change. But there are a lot that you can.'

She's back at uni, she's surfing, living day to day. Hanabeth's

scars from Bali are not physical. Of course her life changed on 12 October. 'It's on a different parallel now,' she says. 'And I've changed so much.'

It's painful to see someone so young saying they and their country have lost their innocence.

'I've been in a nightclub since, a couple of times, and the fire alarm will go off and everyone will keep dancing, ignore it,' she says. 'I get straight to the exit. For a long time I was ultra-sensitive to any smell of burning or any loud bangs. Even people slamming the boot of their car. I think I've moved on from that now.'

Bali has encouraged her not to take things for granted. 'I tried not to take things for granted beforehand, but I know now how fragile life is and what a precious gift each day is.

'Some people might wonder why I'm so cheerful all the time. Well, I'm so happy to be alive and I know how close it could have been that I wasn't. And I could have been badly injured. I've met so many wonderful people since who were injured that night.'

She says there is a strong connection between people who were there. 'They are such a wonderful group of people, so strong. They really have dealt with it in such a positive way.

'If nothing else, it has shown me the good side of human nature, how much people come together when you really need it. And I really did need that. I really can say that support helped me get through it.

'There was talk of how Australians helped Australians. But for me alone that night it was Americans, Germans, French, Balinese, all helping each other together, and I think that was a beautiful message. You don't think of somebody's nationality when you pick them up off the ground. It's innate in most of us. Most people would have done exactly as I did. I just got the photo taken.'

She wants to be in Bali for the anniversary next month and will take up the Federal Government's offer to fly her there. 'I think I owe it to the Balinese, I owe it to myself and I owe it to Marc to be there.'

She would also travel back to Bali for a holiday. 'Of course I would. Personally, I would find it difficult to go dancing in Bali again, maybe. But over time, perhaps that too will change.'

She lived in Western Australia for a few months earlier this year, working in a winery in Margaret River and tackling the famously huge waves that grind in there. She still finds solace in the ocean using her 'quiver' of surfboards, including Marc's two Malibus. 'I like to think of the ocean as my chapel. That's where I take my time out. Good for body, mind and soul.'

When Amrozi was sentenced in August, she was indifferent. 'I didn't feel a whole lot, to be honest. The damage in my life's already been done. He's been convicted, the Indonesian Government have got it under their control. They're doing what they can the way they see is the right way, and you have to respect that.'

Hanabeth has kept a diary since the bombing and has spent the past six months writing a semi-autobiographical novel. 'I'm trying to capture everything about my relationship with Marc before my memory goes.'

We go for a walk on the beach. It's late afternoon, so the tradies are pulling up in their vans to check the surf, an Australian ritual not peculiar to this town.

Hanabeth has exams coming up, so that's occupying her mind. But after they're finished, she hopes to buy a camera, a couple of different lenses and a tripod, and travel around Australia shooting pictures of surfers.

It's time to go forwards, without forgetting the past.

*September 2003*

*Hanabeth Luke continued studying Environmental Science and Management in Lismore and is writing a book based on her experience in Bali. She is working with her family and the family of Marc Gajardo to help fund a 'Peace School' in Tuban, Bali.*

# Brian Goldsmith

Brian Goldsmith says it's strange, but getting cancer didn't scare him that much. He smoked for 30 years and that was a gamble and this was the result. He didn't cry about it, and he wasn't bitter that it happened despite his having given up cigarettes 20 years ago. He was tough about the aggravation of radiotherapy, and the shock of it didn't summon any great mission to fight for his life.

But as he drove away from Peter MacCallum Hospital with his partner, Lorraine Dennerstein, in the days before Christmas last year, Goldsmith vowed to make a positive out of the terrible news a biopsy had revealed: cancer of the tongue. 'Instead of him being "Poor me," he said, "Right, we are going to make sure that some good comes out of this; we are going to stop the kids smoking," ' says Dennerstein, who is a

professor of psychiatry at Melbourne University.

He followed up by insisting his children and some friends witness him being strapped on to a table and having a mask fitted to his face to hold his head still, ready for the radiation rays that were aimed at the cancer spot at the back of his tongue. It was Goldsmith's way of helping his children be 'scared straight'. If he was going to die, it wouldn't be for nothing.

For the Goldsmith children it was devastating to walk into a ward of mainly men suffering from smoking-related illnesses and to see their father, a man of such apparent invulnerability, enduring the treatment. 'It was incredibly difficult for everybody who loved him because there was a powerlessness,' says his daughter Fiona. 'Dad always said to us, "You can do anything," but now we knew we couldn't.'

'Their father had always been the strong one, always been father and mother to his children,' says Dennerstein. 'To see this big strong man being belted on to a radiation machine was very upsetting for everyone.'

It had all started when Dennerstein noticed Goldsmith breathing strangely at night. He put it down to too much chilli in the cooking, or maybe the red wine, but she was concerned and took him to see a specialist the next day.

In late January, Goldsmith, shedding weight and in agony, was still telling the world he was fine. 'But he wasn't fine,' says Dennerstein. 'He didn't want to take any painkillers at all. When he went to see the specialist he would put on his thickest woollen jacket and fill the pockets with coins to make out he hadn't lost as much weight as he had. I love him dearly, but he was a terrible patient.'

But Goldsmith, who was dodging food, was told that not eating would hinder his healing. When he eventually did learn to act on advice, he faced up to the fight to live with the sort of

stoicism he always displayed. 'He was brought up in an era when you didn't show anything,' says his daughter Tottie, the actor–singer. And he tried to spare the children the worst of it. 'It was pretty uncomfortable,' Goldsmith says. 'I didn't want to upset the children, so I didn't admit to too much. I think I have an ability not to be hurt either physically or mentally.'

Today, we are sitting in his partner's apartment. On the wall is a Charles Billich painting of Goldsmith's severed head being served on a plate, a work that once graced the foyer of his Underground nightclub. His son Sasha delivers some wine to him. Another son, Brett, calls. He rings his ex-wife, Rona, in Los Angeles and they talk of Tot's birthday. It's just another day in the busy Goldsmith life, but he knows he's lucky to experience it. Goldsmith reflects on this new phenomenon in his life called pain. 'I was always curious about how I was going to handle it because I'd never had any pain. I used to box and get a punch in the nose but you don't feel it.'

Eight months later, the radiotherapy appears to have worked. In July, Goldsmith was given as close to an all-clear as cancer patients get. Today, he reflects on his three decades of smoking. At 21 he had his first cigarette, offered to him as a means of relieving the boredom of sitting on a freight train while he was working as a salesman for his family's company. What followed was five decades of almost daily exposure to smoke in his various nightclubs.

'I gave up because I'd found out how bad for your health it was. One didn't know. All I heard as a kid was, "If you smoke it'll stunt your growth." Big deal. And, "It shortens your life." I thought an extra week off your life – when you're 18 – who cares?

'Once this happened, I thought, "Oh well, there you are." I sort of felt, "I've lost." By smoking I gambled and I lost. It's that simple. Don't cry over spilt milk. So I didn't cry, I

accepted what I'd created. I thought, "Now what? I'll just do what they tell me and see what happens".'

Goldsmith underwent radiotherapy almost every day for five weeks, then twice a day for two weeks. He couldn't swallow, could barely talk and was fed soups and juices through a tube up his nose. His children agreed he was never to be left alone during this time. He lost a lot of weight, but his famed positivity never abandoned him. 'A lot of people look at me and say, "Gee, you look well, Brian." I say, "Cancer is the answer."'

At 72, Brian Goldsmith, the man who virtually invented the nightclub in Melbourne, is the eternal 35-year-old. Still bull-chested, still full of ideas, still telling stories, often against himself. He is emotional but not sentimental, and talks about his good times and bad with the same tone of rational bemusement. When told friends were saying some nice things about him, he said, 'Must be drunk.'

Since stumbling upon the idea, almost 50 years ago, of opening a coffee shop, Goldsmith has been the ideas man with the drive to sell them. Straight after leaving Melbourne Grammar in the early 1950s, he started work as a salesman for his family company. They dealt in china, glassware and neckties, but Goldsmith broadened that. He thought up the idea of injecting toy koalas with a perfume that made them smell like the Australian bush. Then there was the small tin of dirt with an opal buried in it, to give tourists an Aussie experience. And the tie called 'The Trickle-Off' that he tried to tempt shops with. 'You could spill your soup on it and it may do in your underpants, but your tie'll be fine,' he says.

He was good at the selling, but he grew tired of it. 'In those days in the country I could tell you the menu in every pub

before you got there. While people like to think country people are friendly, yes, they are to people they know. But try standing there at the bar on your own at 7 o'clock on a weeknight in a country pub with a suit on.'

Told by his friend George Frew, who was on his way to becoming a multi-millionaire hotel developer, that he had the sort of personality that would suit restaurants, Goldsmith opened Goldy's in 1957. 'I had a flat with four mates in St Kilda Road and if we left a chink of light in the window, suddenly we'd have 40 people sitting there. I somehow got the idea that I should open a cafe and they could pay for the pleasure.'

Not yet the confident bon vivant he would become, on opening night Goldsmith retreated to a block of land over the road, 'embarrassed we might get a customer.' The first person to turn up was Victor Smorgon with his three daughters. 'I saw them go in and plucked up my courage to tip-toe in after them,' he says. It was possibly the last time Goldsmith tip-toed anywhere.

The cafe's first waitress was Germaine Greer, whose skills at working the tables were outstripped by her intelligence. 'We used to go to Pellegrini's in Bourke Street and she'd speak Italian and they wouldn't believe she wasn't Italian and hadn't ever been out of Melbourne.'

In *No Return Ticket*, a 1984 book about Australian expatriates, Greer writes of her time at Goldy's ('I was a waitress lots of times, but the best was [at Goldy's]. By that time I knew a lot of people in television and the media and I ran the back room for him where all the television people used to come after hours'.) Greer also writes of her affair with Goldsmith, telling the interviewer: 'I don't mind if you mention names. I believe in kicking ass and taking names, talking loud and drawing a crowd.' Asked about this, Goldsmith says, 'I don't discuss girls'.

With Greer's attitude, it was little wonder she fitted in so well at this bohemian enclave in then-monochromatic Melbourne. Promoter Gary Van Egmont, who worked at Goldy's, used to drive Greer home to her house in Carlton. 'It was the hip place to be,' he says of Goldy's. 'Brian never stopped, he was very flamboyant and he was ahead of his time.'

The coffee shop, with its bohemian and Establishment crowd, was a big hit. 'I couldn't afford a till, so I had a barrel,' Goldsmith says. 'People would get a docket and they'd drop their docket into the barrel, and their money, and take their change. Interestingly enough, it used to balance a bit better than the average till I had at the Underground.' There was a no-grog rule, but when it was broken by actor Danny Kaye, Goldsmith turned a blind eye. 'He would come in secreting a bottle of beer under his jacket and head for the kitchen and share the bottle of beer with the chef,' Goldsmith remembers. 'I felt it was in the kitchen so it was adding to the cooking, so therefore it had a certain legitimacy.'

The film *On the Beach* was being shot in Frankston and Melbourne ('I'm in it somewhere,' Goldsmith says, 'riding a horse down Bourke Street'), and the cast and crew – including Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Anthony Perkins, Fred Astaire and writer James Lee Barrett – would have dinner at Goldy's every night after work. It was at Goldy's that the photographer Athol Shmith introduced Goldsmith to Rona Newton-John, sister of Olivia. Goldsmith and Rona married a year later.

In 1971 – and by now the father of Fiona, Brett, Caroline (Tot) and Jason – Goldsmith opened Peanuts Cellar with the financial backing of George Frew. Peanuts Cellar was a subterranean haunt for types both business and bohemian (he later had Peanuts Gallery in Swanston Street). Goldsmith wanted his places to carry his signature, and for Peanuts Cellar

it was DIY cooking. With a supervising chef, customers cooked their own steaks at a central barbecue.

'He would give people bowls of peanuts and they were encouraged to throw the shells on the floor – almost ordered to,' Frew says. 'The message was, "You were never allowed to do this stuff at home, make sure you do it here."'

As a mentor to his young staff, Goldsmith tried to build confidence and exploit potential. 'For some reason I had that sort of personality where women didn't seem to find me objectionable, didn't find me oppressive, were prepared to treat me as one of them, a person.

'Before then waitressing wasn't a thing acceptable by "Mother". I think I was the first to employ well-educated girls to be waitresses. I had so many parents come in to check me out and make sure it was respectable. And it was respectable. I think we did a lot of good for a lot of girls; gave them a lot of confidence they didn't have.'

It wasn't only young women Goldsmith built up. 'We had a chef who was a very good little cook but, man, he had a sharp edge to him; he was aggressive with people. I decided he lacked personal confidence. I found out that he was quite a champion roller skater. I talked him into wearing his roller skates at work. This gave the man another six inches in height and he improved out of sight.

'He also wasn't all that cute-looking in the eyes of girls. I suggested maybe he'd like to wear a mask. So he became famous as the fastest chef on eight wheels and then he was the fastest masked chef on eight wheels. People would come in from all over to see him. Then he was suddenly this wonderful personality. Subsequently, the mask was off and he didn't need the skates any more and his personality and whole demeanour improved, and he went on to become quite an important businessman.'

But it is the Underground for which Goldsmith will remain most famous. One of a string of buildings in King Street owned by Frew (including Inflation just up the road), the Underground had been used by Frew for storage until Goldsmith, in 1977, had his vision of transforming it into a railway-themed club, complete with a train carriage to house a restaurant. Initially, Frew and Goldsmith were equal partners; Goldsmith later bought him out.

At the entrance was a sign reading 'No tiaras, no tattoos', which encapsulated Goldsmith's rejection of what he saw as both roughness and pretentiousness. The club attracted the young, the old, the colourful, the corporate, English and Hollywood royalty and many others who couldn't get in because of a strict door policy. The door was staffed only by women because, according to Goldsmith, 'it's hard to hit a girl'.

Iain Gillespie was a journalist with the TV show *Willesee at Seven* when he was sent to do a story on this apparent lack of democracy at the club. Gillespie was convinced that the policy worked to keep a lid on aggression. 'He instructed door staff not to reduce people's dignity. It was the way he ran the club without putting people's noses out of joint. He showed how nightlife could be promoted through elegance and style without the violence that occurred in King Street immediately after he left.' It was the start of a 25-year close relationship that Gillespie formed with the Goldsmith family. Goldsmith, says Gillespie, was 'the most engaging and colourful character I'd ever met in my life'. Which made him a good hands-on owner. Goldsmith brought an ethos to his places that no one had seen before: the high-profile host who shaped his clubs in his image. He welcomed all sorts of people as long as they weren't prats or aggressive. He wanted wildness and colour and noise and fun, but he saw his clubs as parties at which he

was host and a certain standard of behaviour was demanded. Goldsmith brought old-fashioned values to the hippest joints in town.

One night David Bowie saw this up close. The singer came into the Underground and started doing the rock-star thing. 'I wasn't very conscious of whether they were big stars, millionaires, not millionaires, poor – I didn't care,' says Goldsmith. 'I had this huge responsibility for running a place and keeping people safe.

'Bowie booked a table and turned up with two mountainous security people. He was saying to the waitress, "Tell that blonde over there she can come and say hello to me." Things that we didn't quite think were correct behaviour. The staff were nonplussed. Jan [Kain, the club's manager] said, "What are you going to do about it?" "I'll go and talk to them." I went up to them and said, "OK, which one of you three is Bowie?" '

Few visiting performers, actors, authors or politicians who came to Melbourne failed to visit the Underground. On one occasion it was organised for Liza Minnelli and her ex-husband Peter Allen, both playing in Melbourne, to meet up there. They sang together around the piano until 5 a.m. Andrew Peacock brought Shirley MacLaine. Bob Hope sat in the DJ booth watching people on the dance floor. Shirley Bassey fought with her boyfriend ('I've never heard swearing like it from a woman in my life,' remembers manager Jan Kain). Liv Ullmann, Boz Scaggs, Harry Belafonte, John Travolta and John McEnroe came through. Every Friday, Derryn Hinch would have lunch in the train carriage.

The security policeman looking after Captain Mark Phillips rang Goldsmith the morning after his visit to ask if anyone had found his diary containing Captain Phillips' royal engagements. Goldsmith went into the club, looked around and

couldn't find it. Concerned it might have gone into the rubbish, he climbed into the skip in the back laneway and, after a dirty search, found it.

His staff thought he was eccentric but loveable. Jan Kain remembers that after a sleep, Goldsmith would 'arrive at 3 a.m. in his pyjamas or a T-shirt inside-out with tousled hair and keep us there till five or six in the morning because he was wide awake'.

The Underground brought Goldsmith together with, on the surface, an unlikely friend: former Liberal premier the late Sir Rupert Hamer. Goldsmith and Hamer not only became close friends, but business partners in a wool-growing 'village farm' called Lyndale Park at Tallarook in northern Victoria.

He met Hamer in 1981 at the Underground in the week Hamer was replaced as leader by Lindsay Thompson. 'He was in a casual shirt, dancing, having a wonderful time,' Goldsmith remembers, 'and I thought, "That's the sort of man I'd like on my board."' Plucking up the courage to call him, Goldsmith learned Hamer had checked him out and said, 'I've heard you run it properly. I'm happy to help you'.

Lady Hamer says now: 'Dick and Brian had a very good friendship. I think they had fun together. It must have been a case of opposites attracting.'

Goldsmith was an ideas guy. Some hit, others missed. His friend Iain Gillespie says, 'He is an original and lateral thinker who comes up with 40 ideas a day, five of which are usable and one of which will succeed.'

Friend George Frew says, 'Crazy ideas poured out of him. He told me once about his plan to build something that looks like an elevator at the entrance to The Underground and he'd use a motor to make the vibrations. I thought, "Oh Jesus, here we go again."'

Gillespie, also on Goldsmith's board, remembers him 'shooting ideas out at 100 miles an hour'. At one board meeting, Goldsmith said, 'I've got an idea!' Dick Hamer turned to him and, with humour and affection said, 'Internalise it.'

Goldsmith says his biggest disappointment was in 2001. A syndicate headed by Goldsmith, Hamer and developer Roger Hart was formed to propose building a train-themed series of restaurants and cafes alongside a wide, covered walkway on Sandridge railway bridge. There would also be three chapels, which Goldsmith wanted to call 'Chapel Street'. The project, to be called The Spirit of Progress, reached a short list of six, but went no further. 'It should have been a symbol of Melbourne,' he says now. But there was always another venture to launch, and the selling of the Underground in 1986 for $4.5 million gave him that chance. Goldsmith sold the club because 'I probably felt I was tired'.

But the precinct changed, and Goldsmith watched as his beloved King Street became one of Melbourne's most menacing trouble spots, with stabbings, shootings and groups of patrolling police. He bought back into the Underground in 1992, but it was too late. King Street had become a place for young stallions in hot cars, men's clubs and an aggressive mood.

The next year he opened the Redhead nightclub, named for his fourth wife, Jennifer, at the edge of Albert Park Lake. The club was another hit. But in the build-up to the arrival of the Formula One grand prix, the existence of the club on land ostensibly controlled by the Grand Prix Corporation became precarious. He says business was choked off and in 1999 he was forced to close the club, and was close to liquidation. Goldsmith had to sell the family home and a country property.

But his family was always behind him. Goldsmith has been

married and divorced four times. When he was 60, his then wife, Jennifer, gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth. He had been pining for grandchildren. 'I thought for a while I wasn't going to get any, so that's probably how Elizabeth came – I had to produce my own grandchild.' (He now has three grandchildren.)

He has been a 'solid, warm, exciting, funny, cheeky and generous' father (according to Tottie) to eight children: Fiona, 44 (who runs a yoga and pilates school); Brett, 43 (a music producer); Tot, 42; Jason, 34 (who works in IT); Sasha, 29 (involved in a wine business with his father); Briony, 25 (a nutritionist); Charlie, 24 (owns a printing business); and Elizabeth, 12. 'He would give people the shirt off his back,' says Tot. 'He taught me you could give everything away and still be rich.'

After a colourful two years in the mid-1970s living in Hatter's Castle, a South Yarra pub Goldsmith ran for a while, the Goldsmiths grew up in a huge family compound in Punt Road, South Yarra. 'When the older ones got to be 16 or 17, the suspicion was they would go and get a flat with their mates,' Goldsmith says. 'It was better to let them all have flats next to me.'

The Goldsmith compound was famous for its often wild social life and colourful guests. Tot came home one day to find 'a huge man in my bed sleeping next to a gun in a holster'. She screamed. He turned out to be an actor and the gun was a prop.

The family operated according to the credo that kindness was paramount. On a tram once, a Fijian man who spoke little English told the conductor he was lost. Asked for help, Goldsmith took the man home, where he stayed for a year. Deep Singh came to refer to Tot by her real name: 'dear sister Caroline'. 'We went to visit him in Fiji,' remembers Tot, 'and

he had organised bourbon and Coke for Dad – his drink. In Fiji, that was like finding gold.'

Goldsmith says that juggling the family relationships has been a challenge. 'I retained a terrific relationship with all my mothers-in-law and a pretty good relationship with all my ex-wives. The point is I have respect for their families, too. I take that on as a huge personal responsibility.'

On the occasion of his 60th birthday, Irene Newton-John, the mother of Rona and Olivia Newton-John, wrote: 'This is to testify that Brian Goldsmith, my ex-son-in-law, is anything but ex in my affections . . . I wonder how many ex-mothers-in-law are as fortunate as I have been to find such a good friend in the father of their grandchildren, who understood the importance of my relationship with them and accepted me as a member of the family.' Mrs Newton-John died last year.

For the same occasion, Olivia Newton-John chose verse to remember the early days: 'It doesn't seem that long ago that you were 30 and I was 13 . . . You loved to sing wherever we went – out of tune, but confident.'

His competitors rhapsodised too. Brothers George and Sam Frantzeskos, who in the 1980s ran the competing Inflation nightclub, used a *Godfather* theme to wish him a happy birthday. The message, headed 'To the Godfather of Discotology', read: 'Dear Don, you let us into the "family" by selling the Peanuts Gallery to us for just a few lire and the kiss of your ring. You taught us the subtleties of running this business ($1 per hour, drink cards, door bitches to name a few) and you were always so generous with your advice (some say too generous) . . . Love and respect from your protical [*sic*] sons.'

Daily gym visits and walks around the Botanic Gardens have helped Goldsmith regain weight and health. His family know they are lucky to still have him. Lorraine Dennerstein says, 'Smokers remain at risk even though the risk reduces on

giving up. Ex-smokers need to be alert to any odd symptoms, which is the message from Brian's illness.'

Goldsmith has plans for new businesses. After all, he's a working man. He laments that when Elizabeth finishes school he will have paid for 104 years of private schooling.

During his illness, he might have for the first time looked 'fragile' to his children, but the old Goldsmith never went away. Goldsmith recently bumped into Paul Harmer, who in his twenties worked behind the bar at The Underground. Goldsmith asked Harmer what he did now. 'I'm a branding strategist,' Harmer said. Goldsmith's eyes lit up. 'I love branding!' he said. 'I was just thinking the other day about this idea . . .'

*September 2004*

*I met Brian Goldsmith around 1974 at Peanuts Cellar. He was drinking a bourbon and Coke and smoking a cigarette. I was very impressed with the dark, dank glamour of the place, just as I was with his Underground nightclub, a regular haunt for a generation who'd just got their licences and moved out of home. With his open-necked white shirts, quick-fire anecdotes at the ready and his position at the centre of a glamorous Melbourne world, Brian – he was always Brian, even when you were a teenager – was the quintessential funky father, I thought at the time. When preparing this interview, there were so many stories told by, and about, Brian that I had to leave out many more than I used.*

# David Marr

'There's a challenge when you are taking on the job and that is how cruel can you be?' David Marr says of his new role as presenter of ABC TV's *Media Watch*. Cruelty is the last thing on your mind as you move through Marr's double-story Victorian terrace in the inner east of Sydney. The books, for a start: *Imagining the Pacific*, *Renaissance Baroque Art*, *The Wonders of Italy*, *World Furniture*. And the warm, inviting blue of the walls. And the David Moore photographs of beach scenes on a wall. And the two open fires in the living room, cosily set for torching. And the courtyard, with its rickety bench and the crab-apple tree Marr planted when he moved in 20 years ago.

Upstairs, the study where he wrote his biographies of Patrick White and Sir Garfield Barwick is crammed with

other biographies, as well as *The Oxford Companion to Law* and *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, and Paul Kelly's *The End of Certainty*.

Clearly, Marr, 54, is an aesthete. He is also a quintessential inner-urban writer–broadcaster–journalist who grinds his own coffee yet is human enough to want to know more – much more – about the Wayne Carey saga.

How cruel could this man be? 'We'll find out,' he says.

The ABC's most political, hugely popular (it averages 670,000 viewers) and most controversially axed program returns to television tomorrow night after a 17-month rest. Marr is the fourth host since it started life under Stuart Littlemore in 1989. Littlemore, a Queen's Counsel, fronted it for nine years (he left in 1998 when producer David Salter departed). Richard Ackland, another lawyer, took over for two years and Paul Barry, a journalist and the program's last presenter, was at the helm for 12 months.

Its rebirth under Marr is, he says, as potent a message as its axing during the period of what many saw as Jonathan Shier's reign of error. 'The show comes back from the dead because Shier and that lot have gone,' Marr says. 'The axing of *Media Watch* was a public statement about a new kind of culture to come to the ABC. To my mind, a really bad culture. These are new people with a new outlook. The reviving of *Media Watch* is as big a statement about ABC values as the axing of it was.'

It was a decision by Gail Jarvis, Shier's head of TV, to sack presenter Paul Barry in November 2000, amid a litany of staff and public outrage. The program was reportedly axed because Shier had been furious at an interview Barry conducted earlier that month with ABC chairman Donald McDonald, which was perceived to be overly vigorous. The decision made the ABC look thin-skinned and censorial at a time when an

independent program analysing the meltdown within was needed more than ever.

The ABC's attempt at fill-in programs on the media last year was lame. Littlemore returned for a largely uninspiring self-titled 13-part series, which disappeared in May. A cream-pie lifestyle half hour at 6.30 p.m., hosted by former MTV host Annette Shun Wah, replacing commentary with gee-whiz reports on how the industry worked served only to highlight for many how poor Jarvis and Shier's decision had been.

Already, *Media Watch*'s new presenter is on his game. 'Last night on the 6 p.m. radio news [in a technical stuff-up] the ABC managed on both Radio National and local radio to simultaneously broadcast two news services,' Marr says. 'The themes going against one another, two different voices. Interestingly, they didn't have the same lead story. It was amazing. I was raging about that this morning, total mess . . . At the ABC it was kind of, you know, it's that again.'

He knows he has missed some golden opportunities in recent months. 'We went through an exercise of seeing if we could put together a tape of the press outrages that have occurred since *Media Watch* went off air, and there have been some doozies. The unemployed army in the sewers is just a constant pleasure to just mull over.' (A group duped both channels Nine and Seven's evening commercial current-affairs shows into believing they were gangs living underground to see whether the producers would buy it. They did.)

'In a way what's happening in the Senate now is an inquiry into a press outrage. The kids-overboard stuff was all about manipulating the news, and I think we were all, as journalists, remiss in not protesting and commenting at the time when Peter Reith shut down press access to the military, except through his office.'

He feels Carey and others involved in the football saga got too much free airtime. 'On the whole, the press treated the Kirby stuff with due scepticism and put it under good scrutiny and it did not survive as a story,' Marr says. 'In the press, it's not often in our careers we see allegations collapse as spectacularly as that and as quickly as that. I think that's a first in my 25-year career.

'The Carey stuff is this completely insane public appetite to know more. I've got to admit to a lot more curiosity about Wayne Carey than Michael Kirby as to actually what went on. Where do we stand with public figures whose sexual indiscretion becomes a matter of public comment? How much do we have a right to know? I take it for granted that everybody wants to know as much as they can possibly find out – this unending human curiosity about sex.

'The Wayne Carey stuff rolls on because, of course, we're into another fantastically interesting set piece in public life in Australia, which deeply involves the press, and that is the repentant sportsman. The sportsman is ejected from his team for some gross misbehaviour. It can be a finger up the bum of his opponents on the field, the Hopoate problem, it can be the Wayne Carey problem, rooting your vice-captain's wife, or it can be taking recreational drugs.

'They are booted out of their clubs and the question is, how long do they stay out of the club? Because they always come back. How much penance do you have to do? How many grovelling statements do you have to have published in the press . . . about your immense sorrow at what you've done? Who writes them? We really need to find out who writes these fabulous statements of emotional regret. It is something we'll look at this year.'

Former veteran *Media Watch* executive producer David Salter believes the right person is doing the job. 'I think he is

a very good choice, as long as his sabbatical from Fairfax is a genuine one,' Salter says. 'I'd hate to think there are some lingering loyalties that might prejudice his judgment.'

Salter says Marr is 'a very fine reader of the media and from his public stances on several issues he's obviously committed to the ideas of diversity and independence; he's also a damn fine practitioner [of journalism].'

Marr plans to produce a *Media Watch* similar to Littlemore's, which rarely gave the show over to a theme or an extended interview, rather dealing with a range of screw-ups. 'I'm a great admirer of the Littlemore *Media Watch*,' he says. 'At its best, Australian television has never seen anything like that kind of forensic intelligence staring straight down a camera and giving it to people, [which] was thrilling; it was a bloodsport. I think there is always a problem with *Media Watch* about whether or not what you're looking at deserves the attention you give it... Stuart did towards the end wheel out the sledgehammer to go at some very tiny peas.

'I don't want to be schoolmarmish. I think that was a problem with Littlemore... I'm a bad speller. I'll hesitate to criticise anyone's spelling. But then people come up with these fabulous, unbelievable typos. On the front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* somebody was described as being "naked from the waste up". And you have to ask yourself, "How naked was that?"'

The program, while admired by many for its work in highlighting media laziness or ethical transgressions, was criticised for not correcting its own mistakes.

'That was only a problem with Littlemore,' Marr says. 'Since then the show has corrected its mistakes. I'm a great believer in correcting. I don't believe you do your prestige any harm by correcting where correction is required. But then, a

lot of people who are damaged by the show believe a correction is due when it's not.'

Marr, against the backdrop of presenters being sacked and other management interference, has set the ground rules for his involvement: he and producer Peter McEvoy answer only to Sandra Levy, head of television, and to the ABC's legal department. 'It is understood . . . that the ABC does not interfere with the judgments that we bring to bear. ABC legal, of course, have a right to [be involved]. If we are going to kick the shit out of an ABC program, there is an unfettered right to do it. If there is any sign of fettering, I would certainly piss off.'

*Media Watch* is one of the ABC's most popular programs, largely because it has the licence to do what no commercial network can: independently observe the media. Despite the show's sometimes ludicrous highlighting of the most minor of transgressions and obsession with banana-peel bloopers, it has performed a useful service. Channel Seven reporters will no doubt hesitate before they purport to be driving a car in Majorca in the Skase chase when in fact they were driving a car in Barcelona, for instance.

It has also broken stories itself, notably the John Laws cash-for-comment story in 1999, which prompted an inquiry into commercial radio ethics and a Gold Walkley award for the program.

'It doesn't keep journalists honest and accurate, because otherwise the show could have been parked a few years ago, a job well done, and we could all have moved on to something else,' Marr says.

Can it have a real impact? 'I think it does. I don't think there's a good journalist in this country who doesn't occasionally think that corner cannot be cut because they couldn't live with the embarrassment if it were the subject of ridicule on

*Media Watch*. For those of our shameless colleagues, it probably doesn't work, but it had a disciplining effect. But it also has a function with the general public, which is a place in the media itself, where they can see their own rage and disgust expressed.'

Did he think cash-for-comment had any positive results? 'Why can't we be in the same position as the USA, where presenters who plug products without revealing that they have commercial arrangements with those people, or without properly distinguishing between editorial and advertising, are prosecuted?'

Marr says he is a 'fundamentalist' about journalism. 'I'm not impressed by those arguments that surround us in journalism now about the need to cut ethical and other corners because of budgetary constraints,' he says. 'I think newspapers, television stations, radio stations must pay their own way. I don't believe in any freebies, any kind of financial or other assistance being extended to the press by those the press is writing about and examining. And that kind of puritan fundamentalism about the press helps me approach the notion of where I stand in the job, because I think nearly always the problems are very clear cut. *Media Watch* does deal in grey areas and its judgments are, and rightly, contested; they should be the subject of debate.'

Marr comes to the job after a 30-year career in journalism, which followed a two-year stint as a commercial lawyer, a job that rarely excited him. 'Some of it was simply dreadful,' he remembers. 'I spent about nine months signing people up to Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise agreements. It does mean that I never pass a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet without wondering whether some poor soul was signed up by me.

'The firm was full of people in their late thirties whingeing

about the fact they were rich lawyers and they'd never wanted their lives to turn out like this.'

But in the early 1970s there was one case that piqued his interest. His firm represented Penguin Books, which had been prosecuted for publishing Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* on the grounds it was obscene. 'I was the dogsbody of the team. That involved many wonderful things: Bill Deane arguing for the glories of this comic novel about masturbation is still something that can give me pleasure thinking back on it.

'Just after he became Governor-General I bumped into him somewhere and remarked it was he who had opened the floodgates of pornography in Australia. He just sort of gave a benign smile. He was fantastic. He made *Portnoy's Complaint* sound something like not that far short of the Bible as a necessary text.'

It was during that case that Marr first met Patrick White, who was appearing as an expert witness. 'They were trying to get him to flinch about the sort of filth in the book and finally he looked down at this QC who was trying to make him flinch and said, "Worse things happen at Sydney parties, you know."'

In 1973, Marr joined *The Bulletin* as it was undergoing one of its early attempts at reinvention. In 1976, he went to *The National Times*, a crusading weekly newspaper published by Fairfax, which was famous for its investigative articles exposing corruption in the law, the police and politics. According to journalist Brian Toohey, who worked with Marr at the paper, Marr brought 'a standard of ethics to what he does'.

At a youthful 32, he became *The National Times* editor, but the experience was marred by his editor-in-chief, Max Suich, refusing to let him run his own ship.

'Max had gone from being a very resourceful and ingenious editor of *The National Times* to being editor-in-chief of

all Fairfax publications,' Marr says. 'His first love was *The National Times* and he still wanted to edit that . . . I kept being reminded that I was really his dogsbody in that enterprise. That was partly my fault for not standing up to him, partly his passion for the paper, which he couldn't rein in. I felt like a puppet. But we did terrific things.'

'I think he's being generous,' Suich says now. 'I think it's true that I gave inordinate attention to *The National Times*, although I tried not to. When an editor-in-chief is looking over your shoulder, it's a pain in the arse.'

After Marr and Suich had fallen out over a series of disputes and disagreements, Marr left the editor's chair and returned to writing. Today, Suich says Marr is 'very clever'. 'David was a quite well equipped lawyer who had a nose for the smell in the law, by which I mean rotting smell.'

'I thought he was obviously a first-rate mind and a very good journalist,' says veteran journalist Evan Whitton, who recommended Marr succeed him as *The National Times* editor. Whitton hopes Marr can reshape *Media Watch* into a program that is not relentlessly carping about journalism's faults. 'That is just so easy. It's like shooting fish in a barrel. I think sometimes a program like that should point out good work, like [*The Age*'s] Andrew Rule's.' (Rule wrote last year's multi-award-winning 'Geoff Clark: Power and Rape' article.)

It is a viewpoint often scorned by former *Media Watch* producers: why be a cheer squad for hacks? Whitton says: 'It will be interesting to see if he just goes on the attack and shoots the fish in the barrel or whether he broadens it out to watch the media. Littlemore was a joke when he was talking about the literals [spelling and grammatical errors]. Anyone can do that.'

Marr joined the ABC's *Four Corners* team as a reporter in 1985, has presented Radio National's *Arts Today* program and

has in recent years worked as a journalist with *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from which he has taken leave of absence to work on his other project, a book on the Tampa affair, co-written with former *National Times* journalist Marian Wilkinson. 'Having decided I didn't want to be a lawyer . . . and get out and be a journalist, I've written about the law my entire career in one way or another. I realised that one of my passions is lawfulness, lawful behaviour, fairness,' he says.

'The Tampa story is the story about a lawless, successful attempt by a government to manipulate events to electoral advantage. What makes it a particularly grave series of events is that the law they were dealing with were laws of sea rescue. Fundamental, maritime law that has as its purpose the saving of life.

'And however the Australian Government squirms about this, the fact is what they did puts in danger international conventions on the saving of life. And they did that for electoral advantage. The politics of it were superb.

'One of the very interesting things about this country we live in is that we see ourselves as happy-go-lucky people who don't give a fig for authority. That is profound bullshit. Australians are deeply trustful of authority and deeply trustful of government, particularly of federal governments . . . I think one of the reasons Canberra was able to get away with what it got away with last year is because of that trust. I think what they did last year undermines that trust in a way that we will discover decades down the track.'

The Tampa story affected him greatly. 'It's not just about those events. It's about how it could come about that nearly all of the institutions in the Westminster style of government failed last year . . . We do not live in a country that has a fundamental commitment to the rule of law, and that I find really disturbing.'

The new TV role will slow down his book, but his training as a working daily journalist as well as an author monkishly beavering away on a long-term book project should get him through. His biography of Patrick White involved working 'with and around' an 'extremely demanding' man for seven years. The result was well received both by critics and readers and, largely, White himself.

'He went from being crabby and suspicious – grumpy throughout, by the way – then helpful and warm for years and years,' Marr remembers. 'And then exasperated because I wouldn't finish. What I don't think he understood was I was about to write a book about one of the greatest masters of the English language . . . and I was determined that my book would not imitate him in any way but it would be well written. And that takes time.

'He knew he could die at any minute. He was old and frail and he was a bit fed up with life and he wanted to see this thing. He wanted most of all to hear the reactions of people when it was published. Towards the end he was just furious with me. That phone would ring, "When are you going to finish that f— book!" Slam.

'He told me that he read it often through tears, that he disagreed with a lot of it, but he did like it. The depth of cruelty of the man was amazing. He said, "When do we sit down with it?" I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, we're going to go through it together." He made me sit with him for nine days while he read the book in front of me . . . He would roar with laughter and I would hope it was one of my jokes and it would turn out to be something I was quoting from one of his letters. And then when that was over, he died. He died a couple of weeks later.'

Marr is getting ready for his new role as media judge and jury. He says the issue of cross-media and foreign ownership,

usually an issue that threatens to 'bore us to death', will be one that *Media Watch* will this year try to keep fresh. He says recent suggestions by the Federal Government that the Australian Broadcasting Authority would have a supervisory role in editorial policies of these new media conglomerates is staggering. 'The naivety and lack of feel for the issues displayed by the government in the drafting of that legislation is staggering. The notion that you would have Professor [David] Flint [chairman of the ABA] sitting there adjudicating whether there is sufficient independence between the newsroom in your newspaper and the newsroom in your television station is staggering.'

Being a journalistic fundamentalist is all very well. But what happens when a friend screws up? 'I am going somewhere I've never been before, which is to stand up in public and, at times, be brutal about people I like. You hope your friends aren't going to be the ones who are doing the bad journalism. You have this kind of vague belief that your friends aren't the ones who are cutting the corners. But it is going to happen. I don't look forward to it.'

*April 2002*

*David Marr resigned as* Media Watch *host in 2004 after three seasons. He scored some big hits, including revealing friendly letters between radio broadcaster Alan Jones and the chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority, David Flint, who quit his position in 2004. Marr returned to writing for* The Sydney Morning Herald.

# Glenn Murcutt

We are standing outside Glenn Murcutt's house in a Sydney harbourside suburb. Or are we? It's a small, squat, unprepossessing brick veneer. It's about as far removed from the quintessential 'Murcutt house' as it could possibly be. Can this be the house of the celebrated Australian architect, the naturalist, the humanist, the environmentalist? Is this where the recent recipient of the Nobel Prize for architecture kicks back? Is this the font of his creation?

Have we got the wrong address?

Luckily, as we make our way through the carport to the front door, Murcutt is there to greet us. Turns out it's the house he and his second wife, architect Wendy Lewin, and his 13-year-old stepdaughter, Anna, are renting while they build the house Murcutt and Lewin spent five years designing

together. And so it is to this confined living room, doubling as an office, that we are led, to begin one of Murcutt's rare interviews.

It wasn't easy getting this far. He has had an uneasy relationship with the media. On the phone he said, 'I've got 100 requests. I've got a pile of faxes two-and-a-half centimetres high. If I give everyone an hour and a half, I'd never get any work done. I'm a sole practitioner. It's about survival.'

Once in the door, though, he is the most gracious of hosts. 'Once he's committed to something, he'll give it everything,' says Janne Ryan, who produced an ABC documentary about architects that featured Murcutt.

He's only ever played by his own rules, refusing to compromise his ideals. Mainly because, as a solo act, he can. He doesn't need, or particularly want, the attention and has no 'message' to impart. But he says if he had a message, it would be 'For God's sake, do sensible and poetic things. The junction of the rational and the poetic must be integral.'

He is a far cry from the publicity-seeking 'starchitects', or what Janne Ryan calls the 'watch me' architects, dotted across the country. Working only in Australia, he refuses to take on big jobs because that would mean the personal attention he lavishes on projects would be compromised. There's a lot of Murcutt in a Murcutt house.

Murcutt speaks softly and quickly, a torrent of ideas and passion about his profession. He is extremely modest for such an achiever. He would rather let his work speak for him. 'I might have won all these incredible things over the past five years, but if you thought about it all the time you wouldn't get on to tomorrow,' he says. 'I've got all the hassles of tomorrow to face. These [awards] are blips in the landscape of my life.'

Talking to the media is, he says, 'a lot of wasted time'. 'I've got work to do. [If] I'm talking to you, I'm not doing my work.

This is costing me money. When I'm at meetings for boards at universities, everybody starts chatting afterwards and I say, "I've got to go." I point out, "You're all being paid for your talking here, I'm not."

'I'm not first night. I like privacy. But every now and again I come out and I present and it's a nice event and then I'll go back again. You've got the tap you can turn on and off.'

Happily, today the tap is on. It's a crowded room in here. A number of Aboriginal paintings lean against the wall. On a slatted coffee table sits a pile of books that includes *Concrete Regionalism* and *New Danish Architecture*. Absent is a computer, the tool of trade for virtually every architect. Murcutt has a distaste for them ('Stupid things, they are,' he told *The New York Times*). In a corner there is a pile of faxes rolled onto the floor. Wendy is working at a drawing board. A large video collection of the television comedy *Friends* sits next to a small TV set and on a ledge is a row of colourful birthday cards, Anna's influence on the room. It is not a place where you'd expect to find the recipient of architecture's holy grail, the Pritzker Prize.

Last month, the 66-year-old Murcutt, known around the world as the 'leaves of tin' man who had, in the words of one critic, 'elevated the Australian shed to an art form', was stunned to receive a phone call telling him he'd beaten 600 architects to win international architecture's most prestigious prize, which is accompanied by a $187,000 grant and international acclaim. The jury decided Murcutt's response to the Australian landscape and climate was executed with 'absolute clarity and precise simplicity'.

He is the first Australian to win it, which could explain why *Newsweek* magazine asked 'Glenn who?' and *The New York Times* embarrassed itself with the headline 'Crocodile Dundee with a Pritzker Prize'. The prize usually goes to celebrity

names working in big firms on large projects, so when a sole operator from the Antipodes won, it caused a stir in world architectural circles.

When he was told about the award, 'I got a bit of a shock,' he says. 'I started to perspire. I could hardly speak for half a minute.'

In the early 1970s, Murcutt was one of the pioneers of a revolution in Australian architecture, building what were then audaciously simple and environmentally sensitive modernist houses, unshackled from the notion of the house and the outdoors being entirely separate entities. He famously used corrugated galvanised iron for not just the roof but the walls, for what he came to call the skin of the building. He also incorporated the verandah into the body of the house rather than in its traditional use around the perimeter.

His houses were determinedly part of the environment, not fighting it. He drew influence from many sources, among them the Australian wool shed, the modernist works of German innovator Mies van der Rohe and the emphasis on the environment by the Finnish architect and designer Alvar Aalto.

Murcutt's work is based around a philosophy stemming from the words of the Aboriginal people of Western Australia that we 'touch the earth lightly', a plea to leave nature as undisturbed as possible. Murcutt once wrote: 'My architecture has attempted to convey something of the discrete character of elements in the Australian landscape, to offer my interpretation in built form. I am opposed to the total taming of this land and the loss of wildness of the native scene. The land appeals for care and we need to become friends with the landscape and not be threatened by it.'

Murcutt has chafed against his reputation as a designer of tin houses in the country. 'A lot of people forget I am doing a lot of work in the urban fabric.'

Much admired and, as the years went on, often copied, the 'Murcutt' house became a signature, beloved of architecture magazines because of the shock value that accompanied them in the early days and their innate, bold Australian-ness. Today, he says of the copiers, 'When a thing is copied without an understanding of the principles behind the design, it's very annoying because it tends to debase the thinking. When the influence and principles have been understood, then it's most gratifying.'

Murcutt's son, 37-year-old Nicholas Murcutt, is also an architect (his other son, Daniel, 35, is a library technician). 'If I were him I would feel disappointed that some of his more easily recognisable ideas could be replicated in such a banal way,' Nicholas says. '[In someone else's hands] they become cumbersome and tend to diminish some of the quality of those original ideas, and people start to think these things are his work.'

Murcutt's award was warmly received by many in his profession. Roger Wood of Wood Marsh Architects described Murcutt as 'one of the world's best house designers' who 'finds exquisite ways of making the building live'. Wood says, 'The fact that he's chosen to remain a sole practitioner is testament to the quality of his work.'

Murcutt was overwhelmed by letters and faxes of congratulation. 'There is incredible support for it from the most unlikely sources, from architects who I would never have thought would have given me support,' he says.

Murcutt's success and profile go some way towards explaining why he so appreciated the fulsome reaction to the award. 'There has been over the past decade a considerable degree of jealousy of Glenn's achievements and public recognition,' says Melbourne architect Peter Corrigan, a guest professor at Harvard University in the United States who has known Murcutt for 25 years.

'He has been begrudged by his peers. He reached a point – quite an extraordinary point – where he won so many awards, and that was generating such ill will that he became reluctant to enter them. He was holding work back because he couldn't be bothered with all the bickering and the gossip in Sydney that surrounded his winning.'

Even the Pritzker Prize jury chairman, J. Carter Brown, addressed the issue: 'Glenn Murcutt occupies a unique place in today's architectural firmament. In an age obsessed with celebrity, the glitz of our "starchitects", backed by large staffs and copious public-relations support, dominate the headlines. As a total contrast, our laureate works in a one-person office on the other side of the world, far from much of the architectural attention, yet has a waiting list of clients . . . He is an innovative architectural technician who is capable of turning his sensitivity to the environment and to locality into forthright, totally honest, non-showy works of art. Bravo!'

'The profession is a little bit tough on the profession,' Murcutt says of the sniping in the industry. 'It's an extraordinarily competitive profession, in a way. If I see somebody doing really good work, I really enjoy it because I know how difficult architecture is. It's really damned hard. And with all the responsibilities and requirements placed on us by so many people, and the potential for getting oneself into trouble is so great, the level of responsibility is enormous.

'I'm not in the business of criticising the rest of my profession; I'm in the business of trying to do decent work. That's one of the great problems in the profession – and any profession, I might add – that anything that's to do with the self, it is always looking over one's shoulder to see who's close by or what's happening beside. That sort of comparison, they're odious. If anyone's doing good work, support them.'

Murcutt has the world of architecture at his feet. He could

do any project he liked in any country up to a certain scale, given he's a one-man show. But he needs to keep things simple and doesn't want briefs that take four years.

'I'm an impatient person,' he says. 'I cannot be on anything for too long. I've got to have change of work, change of sites. I love the idea of experimentation, I love the idea of discovery.'

Fame and material possessions are certainly not his driving force. Rather, the building is the thing. When he is too busy to take on jobs, he sends them to other good young architects. 'I believe in architecture, not in myself,' he says simply.

He has always charged standard fees and won't bump up the price as his profile grows. 'My fees are regular fees,' he says. 'They would be at the bottom end of the sort of work being done in Sydney for private clients. I have always wanted to reach the best clientele, which are often not those who pay the most.'

'He's not in it for the money,' says Peter Corrigan. 'He's too often seen as an egotist who's a somewhat wilful outsider. That's what the award is recognising. He's lived his own life, which is an Australian life. We've had noisy winners of awards, a few other pretenders. No one has ever stood up and said, "I am an Australian," which Glenn has, and for that we should be extremely grateful.'

Murcutt's driving force is his passion for what architecture can be, and people's responses to it. 'The nicest thing I can get is these beautiful letters from clients – they've discovered something new,' he says. 'They say it's been a journey of discovery; living in these buildings is like sailing a yacht . . . That is what's very important for me.

'They say, "We had this morning some sort of bird that came in and it was foraging around the window and we could see it and it couldn't see us; the lyrebirds came around the pond . . . " A client will ring and say, "The light coming in

here is remarkable, you've got to come up here and stay overnight and see it."

'I have had the most positive feedback that any architect could ever desire. It has just been the most rewarding occupation. Painful, but rewarding.'

Sometimes the feedback is even more direct. Two years ago, when Murcutt was being interviewed in Kempsey in northern New South Wales for the ABC series *In the Mind of the Architect*, a French man and woman, on a pilgrimage to see Murcutt's work, stood at the gate peering at the famous Kempsey farmhouse he'd designed.

'They were invited to come to the house,' Murcutt remembers, 'and one of them started asking questions about the architect and I said, "But I'm the architect," and this woman nearly fell over backwards. The guy said, "You have been her hero."'

Murcutt's passion could at times be read as intensity. Asked if he ever gets lonely, he says: 'Many architects say to me, "I don't know how you do it, you're by yourself, you do all your own drawings, you do all your own site inspections [and] administration [and] typing," . . . Look, I'm in my head so much of the time, I have no time to feel lonely. You could put me on an island for a year and give me some paper and a pencil, I won't be lonely . . . On the other hand, I love company. So the idea of not experiencing loneliness is not a denial of one's vulnerability, it's much more about living in one's head, and I live in my head a lot.

'I don't need company all the time. I don't need sounds around me all the time. I enjoy silence. I love the ability to visualise, to actually see while in a state of reverie. You know that stage between sleeping and waking? . . . When I'm designing I'm in that state. I'm not conscious of where I am . . . I can be in a slum, as I've lived a lot of my life.'

He is referring to the state of the average-looking Federation house he and Wendy own in the same suburb, a house that has been awaiting renovation for the past 10 years. They moved out recently so work could finally start.

'I have visitors come from all parts of the world to the site,' he says, 'and they look at their notes to see if they have the right address, then go and telephone me to make sure. That's happened at least 20 times.

'The house I've lived in for the past 10 years is totally chaotic. Of the 1.2-metre-wide passage, half of that is filled with books. There were papers all over the floor. Wendy says she doesn't know how I can stand living like that. To get to my desk it was like getting into the cockpit of an aeroplane. The whole place was consumed by chaos and my working life is spent trying to achieve the opposite.'

So what sort of house will Murcutt and Lewin make for themselves? They will renovate a narrow, semi-detached cottage using structural steel elements and roof perforations to 'drag light in'. 'It will be a juxtaposition of new and fairly mediocre Federation architecture with the facade that we can't touch,' he says. And yes, past the facade, it will be what you'd imagine. 'We don't come up with a new recipe every Monday morning,' he says.

He loves the rhythm of his working life and what he calls the privileges it allows. 'I love getting into the car and getting onto country roads and being in that environment. I always say, "What a privilege it is to be able to take a day off" while driving to a site. Sometimes I take a flask of coffee, but there are always country towns where you can stop for a sandwich. I've got to know people in some of these towns. It's a very human sort of activity. The way I work is very human.'

Nicholas remembers his father's working habits when he and Daniel were growing up. 'A lot of it happened late at

night,' he says. 'There's a suburban quietness that he absolutely requires for his work. He never plays music. And once he gets into the zone, he's unbelievably quick.'

He's also a perfectionist. Jeff Turnbull, a senior lecturer in architecture, building and planning at Melbourne University, recalls Murcutt coming from Sydney for a weekend workshop with eight students. If they were expecting pleasant chats, they were in for a surprise. 'He was really demanding,' Turnbull says. 'When he felt they hadn't committed themselves he was very critical. He's a perfectionist, that's what he wants and he's pretty annoyed when he doesn't get it.'

That applies, too, to writers about architecture who he believes get things wrong or misread him. 'I've had two or three people who have written on my work very aggressively, entirely adversely, which is fine, but totally misinformed,' Murcutt says. 'I've written to some of these people, spent a day, two days, writing in response to point out that if they hold this position as the masters of gloom, they should get their facts right.'

Murcutt believes his reputation as the quintessential Australian architect always needs clarification. 'I have always said I am designing in Australia, I'm not designing an Australian architecture,' he says. 'I'm designing for place, for the technology that's available to us. I'm designing for the culture I know best.

'I could work outside Australia. I can analyse sites, I can analyse climate. But to analyse culture is a much more complicated issue. To work in Australia is very important to me.'

The perfectionist has taken his sharp eye to the house he's living in. Nothing, it seems, is immune to his passion.

'There's a sloppiness in the nation about lots of things,' he says. 'Just look at our environment. Look at this house we're renting at the moment. It's sloppy. There's no order to it. [It's]

just placing functions in a line and putting a corridor in the middle and that's it.

'[In here] I have no connection to the outside. There's a room down there that has a window to that side and . . . to get to the backyard you have to go out the laundry. I just find that a total, absolute denial of our spirits. It's nothing to do with Australia, nothing to do with this beautiful climate we live in, nothing to do with this beautiful landscape we have.'

Listening to his frank assessment makes you think that having Murcutt over to your own house would be like inviting Paul Bocuse over for a quick matriciana and a salad. But he's not that type of man. As those who know him say, the humanist is revealed at all times.

'He's extremely shy and very funny,' says ABC producer Janne Ryan. 'He often tells jokes against himself, and the world. He's such a pure man. You know, when people are very good at what they do, they are very humble.'

Later, when we're leaving, Murcutt stands in the street pointing over the trees where the site for his new house is ready for the builders. He points in the direction of the house he grew up in, too, all in the same suburb.

Murcutt leans into the car and pores over the street directory to find the quickest way across Sydney. He wants to make sure we get to the airport in time for our flight. Then, in the rear-view mirror, we watch as the 'detail guy', the perfectionist, walks back into the house that's all wrong for him.

*May 2002*

*Glenn Murcutt was initially hesitant to be revealed in a long interview, regarding the two hours of our meeting as time robbed from his work. (One would never consider calling Murcutt a publicity-seeker.) In 2004, with a founding board of architects such as Richard*

*Johnson, Alex Popov and Harry Seidler, Murcutt set up the Australian Architecture Association, designed to educate the public about modern architecture. The association, with Murcutt as president, will present tours of contemporary architecture as well as organising lectures by prominent practitioners. In October 2004, Murcutt told* The Sydney Morning Herald*: 'We want to show the public the relevance of today's architecture, its beauty, the possibilities it suggests for the future. It's time we stopped looking back to the past.'*

# Frank Thring

'*Speeeeak!*' ordered the voice when the phone was, finally, answered. It was a rumbling, elongated bellow emanating from some deep place, a command like a death rattle, an order not to be disobeyed. It was as if I had received a firm request from King Herod, which in a way I had.

Would 11 a.m. suit? 'Oh, it's all aaaaagony,' he moaned in that massive voice, the product of Thring's famous underslung jaw. 'Let's get the aaaaagony out of the way.' Will I come to your home? 'Nobody's ever allowed in,' he said slowly and, now, with real menace.

May we meet at the cafe on the roof of 3RRR, near your Fitzroy home? 'I can see the headline now,' he growled. '"OLD ACTOR BLOWN OFF ROOF ONTO FITZROY SLUM." I should hardly bother turning up. You can write the article already.'

But he does eventually invite me into his home, a little worker's cottage in a narrow Fitzroy street. He is a famous denizen of these parts (he often drops into radio station 3RRR, where he is friends with some of the staff), a Wildean figure clad always in black, wandering along Brunswick Street behind his square sunglasses, thrilling to the boho life he never saw in Toorak, where he lived for 55 of his 68 years.

I follow him into his house as he moves precariously down the corridor favouring a painful foot, past the dining room with its table set formally for six, past the many statues and ornaments and artefacts and into his living room, whereupon he begins shuffling through a drawer. 'You don't need another photograph,' he assures us, pulling out a black-and-white portrait of a very young Thring. 'Use this one by Snowdon.'

Thring takes to a throne-like chair, folding himself into it, his great face hanging down low, imperious and disdainful. He rattles the ice in his drink and, wearing the same glare with which he started the chariot race in *Ben Hur*, seems to dare me to ask him some questions.

An audience with the great Frank Thring is not the smoothest of journeys. (To a Ray Martin question, 'What would you like to do now?', Thring replied, 'Go home.' Speaking of his time in the air force, he told Don Lane, 'I was – not surprisingly – a rear-gunner.') He receives you with an air of mild regret. His sentences take a fortnight to finish, but his silences yawn forever. I ask what a normal day consists of. 'Hiding from you,' he leers.

Sometimes he juts his rabbity lower teeth out with the pleasure of your writhing. He takes you around the room like a cat's paw with a ball of wool. 'This is a very good interview,' he says after one two-week pause. 'You are doing very well.'

I comment on the magnificence of a statue of a black woman. There is a windy silence. Trams rattle by on Bruns-

wick Street. Time passes. Just the tiniest dot of sweat forms on my forehead. A strange ghostly smile from Thring. Let's move right along . . .

'What you must realise,' he says, 'is that when you've done a great deal, as I have, it must be pretty spectacular to interest me. And nothing really has lately.'

Not even 50 years in films and theatre? Does that anniversary mean anything to him? 'Nothing,' he says.

I'd heard that he wasn't well. 'People hear me say, "Ah, McCain, you've done it again," and they say, "Oh, he's aliiiive!" and say to me, "Aren't you ill?" Because I'm staying at the Sebel Town House in Sydney making money, everybody thinks I'm dead in Melbourne. I've been busy. I was doing a pasteurised milk commercial for a mere $9 million a minute!' It's a flourish from the 68-year-old Thring, actorly and grand. The great man in his private, dark lair isn't quite ready for the big sleep. Old Frank is, let me assure you, very alive.

His memory is a Teledex of a thousand show-business stories, many of which have been expunged from his memory, such as his role in the shlock-horror *Howling III*. 'I'd forgotten I'd made it,' he sighs. 'I can't remember anything about it. Everything one makes one makes dozens of; I can't remember any of them. As I give exactly the same performance in each one, it doesn't matter whether I'm playing a werewolf or Pontius Pilate.'

He remembers his friends, many of them now gone. 'Margot Fonteyn was a great friend of mine. Nobody could work out who was with whom in that ensemble between Dame Margot, Nureyev, Frank Thring and Jackie Onassis. They're all dead. I'm surprised that anybody's alive: they fall like leaves out of a tree.'

He'd rather talk about those still alive, such as Mel Gibson and Tina Turner, with whom he worked on *Mad Max III:*

*Beyond Thunderdome*, not the easiest of locations in the 45-degree heat of the desert round Coober Pedy. 'Tina, Mel and I got up on a 40-foot scaffolding and got pissed,' he says. 'That was the simplest way out of that. Nobody could get at us. We were up there and once up there we couldn't get down. Nobody could have a piss. We were all in chain mail and any time you needed to go to the loo it involved a sort of journey to Shangri-la and half an hour with a pair of pliers.'

Thring was one of the first Australians to become an international film star. His destiny in show business was decided early when he started out as a sound-effects man at 3XY, the radio station his father set up in the Princess Theatre and who died when Thring was 10.

'I started my career as a record boy in a radio show. But the point was, I owned the radio show: I owned the whole thing. In those days you had to be able to do everything, so that's why [my generation of actors] can do everything. You were an announcer, and if you couldn't act you weren't employed. I did sound effects, the clinking of glasses: "Do have a drink, my dear, glug, glug, glug," "Why, here comes Amanda now." And at the same time, one is loading two pistols, one in case the other doesn't go off.'

He grew up in Toorak, in the same house he moved out of just 10 years ago. He went to Melbourne Grammar, which he found 'a waste of time', and was driven to school in a Rolls-Royce. Was it a problem with the other boys? 'Noooooooo. It would have been a problem if I didn't have a Rolls-Royce.'

His life is a cocktail of fact and myth (it was, appropriately, Wilde who said the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about). It is a fact, though, that in 1955 he was wed to Melbourne model Joan Cunliffe. While bride and groom stood on Shakespeare's grave at Stratford, Vivien

Leigh and Sir Laurence Olivier were matron of honour and best man.

When his mother died, she left Thring the Toorak house, its contents and a large sum of money. Many years later, there was a rumour that Thring's mother had made his inheritance conditional on his re-marrying. 'That was a myth,' Thring says now. 'Anyway, I was earning more money than she was. She just sat in Toorak and gave bridge parties.' Was he close to his mother? 'Very close over the money . . . However, I got it.'

Thring would like to do more acting but doesn't have the energy. His last appearance with the Melbourne Theatre Company was in *The Importance of Being Earnest* as the two manservants, with Ruth Cracknell as Lady Bracknell. He found it impossible to do eight performances a week, and when the show closed in Albury he took a taxi 200 kilometres back to Melbourne.

'There is nothing worse than this eight performances a week,' he says. 'It's just torrrrture. It's lovely to do it and get it over with and everybody screams and stands on their chairs and throws: well, it depends on your performance what they throw. You can't do it again and again and again for a year. You go mad. Garry McDonald, you know, he's had his nervous breakdown or whatever it is.'

He made a close friend in Charlton Heston during the making of *Ben Hur*. 'He was perfectly nice,' says Thring. It was a lot of waiting around on the set (the filming, he has said, meant that 'one stands there looking magnificent and does three lines every three hours').

'Yes,' he says now. 'Take out your brandy and the ice cubes and keep it up your toga. All the roles are the same. They wanted me to make a film and needed me in Madrid very quickly. I flew over but I learnt the wrong script.' What

happened then? 'Well, it didn't matter. Just changed the toga and put on another feather emerald.'

How does he see his future? 'Oh, a decent play would help. But then you've got to do the f— thing eight times a week. By all means do it, but do it once and get off, to screeeeeeeams of applause.'

Is he frightened of death? 'It's pointless, isn't it?' What does death mean to him? Is it the beginning of another life? 'I don't think so. I think you die. One only hopes that one doesn't die in excruciating agony: that's what one dreads. Months in a hospital bed, dragged up and down, blood pumped into you, blood sucked out. One can live without that.'

How would he like to go? 'Champagne and caviar and a handful of Nembutal, waft away into the middle distance with Dr Death.'

We are at the end of our interview. 'Now what excitement happens?' Thring asks. A photograph, please. Outside? 'I have no outside!' His voice rises quite high in mock-exasperation. 'Look for yourself! My garden, what there is of it, is a jungle. There's no room! I might as well sit in a bowl of flowers!'

Only once in our time together does Thring dispense with the realm of darkness, irony or extreme weariness, and that is when we are outside talking about the houses in his street. He has shuffled out here in his socks. He thoroughly enjoys living in Fitzroy, with its cafes and energy and history. He points out the series of small cottages, bookended by slightly more ornate dwellings. These larger ones, he says, were the homes of the factory foremen. He looks over at the street sign and wonders aloud which local dignitary it was named after. This is the warm Frank Thring that people who know him talk about. The wheezy misanthrope is suddenly gone.

It's such a change in tone that it's almost as though he's out of character. I thoroughly enjoyed the bluster of the other

Frank, the teasing and the mock outrage and the expression of such profound boredom at my presence. But this soft, sweet Frank is, strangely, even more interesting.

*June 1994*

*Frank Thring died in December 1994.*

# Don Dunstan

A soft veil of rain is falling as Don Dunstan leads me through his garden in the serene Adelaide suburb of Norwood. We walk under the greenness of the vines and their bunches of grapes and the Bali-like foliage that spills to the edge of the swimming pool (he puts up with the constant leaves and mud because he likes it to seem a natural body of water). We walk past the monster lemon trees and the fennel shrubs and an assortment of herbs and the towering avocado tree and then into what can only be described as a secret garden, walled-in like a massive Italian courtyard.

This garden is where Don Dunstan is happiest. He points out each herb ('This one is excellent for laksa'), each vegetable, each fruit, each painstakingly tended living thing. He hands me what looks like a cherry tomato and bids me taste it

(it's strong, vaguely sour). 'I like to grow as much as I can of what I eat,' he says. 'I'm starting to enjoy the fact that I have a house and garden which I like.'

Don Dunstan, 67, twice premier of South Australia (1967–68 and 1970–79), aesthete, linguistic pedant, fashion plate, cookbook writer and presider over South Australia's glorious 'Dunstan Decade', has retired. Not just from active politics (he resigned as premier in 1979 because of ill health, announcing it to the press wearing short pyjamas), not just from public office (he left, some say was hounded from, the Victorian Tourism Commission in 1986) and not just from his charity work (he recently told Community Aid Abroad that he no longer had the energy to properly do the work they wanted him to do).

All these duties have been shelved. His retirement is complete. You could call it 'Don's parting'. He now declines public-speaking offers, goes out infrequently and is rarely quoted in the media. The long public life of Donald Allan Dunstan – a seemingly endless source of colour, controversy, wit and civilisation for all of Australia – is now, officially, over. 'It's good to know that I was able to make things better for people,' he says.

His days run, more or less, like this: he gets up, makes some coffee and reads the paper. Then a little time on the piano, 'but not as much as I should like because other duties intrude'. He then tends to his correspondence. 'To my amazement, because it's 15 years since I left active politics, I still get an enormous amount of mail,' he says. 'I bought a word processor and I do my own letters.'

After that, he reads. At the moment, it's the gay writer David Leavitt's new novel. The grand old man of Norwood then shops ('I'm always greeted when I go shopping; Norwood is my village'), cooks and washes, but 'Debbie comes and does the ironing and the major cleaning.' And the garden

takes a bit of work. He goes out 'every so often. Not even every week, but every so often.'

He believes he will spend the rest of his life in this villa – dark, a little forbidding – with occasional visits to his beloved Italy, where he spent a year immediately after resigning as premier. He returned two months ago. 'I constantly find new things there. I was in Venice, where I gave a lecture on the Renaissance, and I found all sorts of things I hadn't known before.'

Dunstan's duty is done. He doesn't have the energy he once did. Now the only struggle left is for history to remember him fairly, as more than just the man who once wore pink shorts into parliament and held 'trendy' parties at his home for the major artists at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts. But, for some, retirement can be a great void, the entrance gate to old age. 'People say to me, mostly my Italian friends, "What are you doing with yourself now?" And I say, "*Mi sto godendo la vita!*" I'm enjoying life!' he laughs.

He is asleep when I arrive. Three people – a cleaner, her daughter and a man who later prepares food in the kitchen – take turns in greeting me at the door. Eventually I am led into his living room, adjacent to the kitchen. Dunstan is gently woken, which gives me 15 minutes to look around at his large, well-used kitchen, his hundreds of books, works of art, in the hallway a series of political cartoons featuring himself, his grand piano, even his Hawaiian ukulele, which has one string missing.

And then there he is, issuing a soft hello and sitting down. His face is still majestic, his luxurious swept-back hair is magnificent for someone approaching 70, but the eternally youthful, handsome Dunstan now seems old and a little frail.

He appears to take some time to gather his thoughts before he lets them out slowly in that famous haughty upper-class voice.

The pain of his life is there right on the surface, the pain of the deaths of people he loved, of divorce and political betrayal and the strange sense that somehow his existence is not quite complete. There's also the slight feeling that we never really appreciated Don Dunstan (it's tempting to juxtapose the new Liberal Premier, the colourless Dean Brown). But overwhelmingly it's the spirit, the gentle humour, the honesty and the bravery of the man that you're left with. And the bemusement.

A successful operation for throat cancer last year has meant his basso profundo voice is raspy, his speech is slower than before and he must have a glass of water on hand all the time.

'I was very fortunate,' he says as his chef sits at the table making spring rolls. 'All the signs suggest they have eliminated the cancer. The only problem I do have is that my saliva glands got knocked about. I had to have three months of intensive radiotherapy and that has meant my mouth is almost continuously dry and I have to carry a watering can with me everywhere I go. It's naturally affected my speech, which gets a bit thick. I have some thick mucous around my vocal chords all the time, which I can't get rid of and it means I can't project. I rarely accept public speaking engagements any more.'

Did the prospect of death frighten him? 'I suppose one always has a fear of the ultimate result. When I was told it was life-threatening, I didn't collapse in a heap. After all, I've been through this sort of thing before. Both my mother and my second wife [Adele Koh] died of cancer.'

Dunstan, the great reformer, can reflect on his achievements in politics not just with the satisfaction gleaned from having turned what was regarded as Australia's most conservative

state into its most liberal, but with the knowledge, now, that his views weren't so outrageous after all. If Don Dunstan were premier today, his views would sound more like common sense than provocative, divisive and histrionic, which is how his opponents then described him.

His pioneering reforms saw licensing laws and dress codes eased, the upper house reformed and one of the worst gerrymanders in history abolished. Under his premiership, the arts community was nourished and the rights of homosexuals and women who wanted abortions were asserted.

The passing of the Mabo bill, he felt, was a particular vindication. 'There are great things that happen at times. Being the originator in government of land rights for Aborigines, I was delighted to see the Blackburn judgment finally bite the dust.

'I find it amusing that many of the things I said and pursued then [that] were regarded as being outré have become received belief as the way in which Australia should go,' Dunstan says.

And, not least of his achievements, Dunstan brought something to politics that Australia had rarely seen: a sense of panache (it's no accident that he mentions another bird of paradise, Gough Whitlam, and himself in the same breath). Occasionally, Dunstan's was a panache perhaps designed to be different from the hordes (the cream safari suits), but he wore his philosophies just as bravely. His style usually found expression in the attitude that politics and public life could be enlightening as well as useful.

But there's not much fun in politics any more. 'I've never been quite guilty of Gough's sense of hubris,' Dunstan laughs. 'I'm not likely to say, "Well, the fun is where I am."' He says he still feels like an outsider. 'The guiding principle of my life has been to not only question other people's but my own assumptions all the time.'

Well before the term SNAG had been coined, Dunstan released, in 1976, *Don Dunstan's Cookbook*, which featured recipes for then newfangled but now ubiquitous dishes such as taramasalata. 'This is not meant to be the kitchen equivalent of *The Joy of Sex*, deservedly a best seller,' he wrote in its preface.

Dunstan says the book garnered the women's vote and helped humanise him as something other than 'a political machine'. 'Many of my associates in politics were absolutely horrified when I said I was going to publish a cookbook,' he says. 'However, I was quite right politically to do it. It was a genuine effort. I'm proud of my little cookbook. There's not a week that passes that someone doesn't come up and say, "We still use your book and this dish is a particular favourite."'

Dunstan was twice married. 'It was very sad that Gretel and I had to part,' he says of his first marriage. 'I won't talk about that because she and I have agreed that we won't.' Gretel came to Dunstan's house for Christmas Day (they have three children who Dunstan is close to).

He and Adele Koh lived together for two years. When they wanted a child, they decided to marry. After some difficulty getting pregnant, Koh miscarried and not long after died of cancer.

'That was a great tragedy,' Dunstan says quietly. 'It was a very punishing time.'

Dunstan has always had close contact with gay people. Many of his friends are gay. When he was Victorian tourism chief in the early '80s, he was criticised for submerging himself in the homosexual community to the detriment of his more political role.

In the public mind, Dunstan's flamboyance has always been associated with his ambiguous sexuality, especially when, last

year at a gay and lesbian rally, he was public in his advocacy of gay rights. He has proclaimed, 'I am not the gay guru of Australia' and yet at the rally he said, '[Gays and lesbians have to] stand up and say what we are, we are proud to be so and we expect to be treated as equals.'

Does this suggest he is more comfortable talking about his sexuality? 'I don't know I've ever felt particularly uncomfortable. I simply never wanted it felt that this was the issue on which I concentrate in Australia, because it wasn't. I don't feel the necessity to talk about my sexuality publicly. I think that's a matter of privacy.'

He describes gays 'outing' people as 'offensive and absurd'. 'I've never liked the intrusion of those who would march round with great flags saying, "I'm gay because I'm gay because I'm gay," and everybody else has to accept that position.'

Dunstan believes his history is studded with misconceptions. He says he was often attacked for concentrating only on 'social justice and the arts and whatnot'. 'But I was light years ahead of anyone else in looking at tertiary industry in Australia. It's not expanding as it was anticipated it would. People said I was not concentrating on industry and development in South Australia, but I was constantly urging South Australians that our employment base was far too predicated to Australian domestic markets.'

The 'porca Madonna' incident was his most famous misrepresentation and, tied up as it was with his demise as chairman of the Victorian Tourism Commission and with his close relationship with the Italian community, it hurt the most. He was asked to launch a book of pieces by gay men called *Being Different*. 'I thought it was quite an important book for people to understand the difficulties and, at times, tragedies of being gay,' he says. After his speech, 'a character I've never seen who was dressed in ecclesiastical drag put on an unscheduled

performance . . . I was asked to have my photo published with some of the contributors and I thought he must have been one of them.

'The photo was taken and appeared in *The Australian*. After I'd left he gave his name as Monsignor Porca Madonna (which literally means "pig mother of Christ"). I was bitterly attacked for insulting the Italian community. It was as if John Cain appeared somewhere and somebody who'd had his photograph taken in the background gave his name to the press as Mr Motherf—. I was hounded by the press, not allowed to reply, and it was the most extraordinary campaign.'

Dunstan resigned the tourism job and attacked sections of the media for 'sheer gutter, dishonest journalism'. He said he was delighted to be 'free once more to be myself' and would go home to Norwood and 'replant my vegetable garden, play my piano, paddle in my pool and I shall not be hassled by the press'.

He says he remains fond of Melbourne, but he felt betrayed and declared he would never again seek a public office. 'I was a bit bitter in Victoria. When I was premier here and the Opposition and the press attacked someone unreasonably, I defended them. I was known to do it. I wasn't going to have people tramped for political reasons in this way. But unfortunately the view of the Victorian Government (led by John Cain) was that they needed to quieten down controversy . . . which left me hanging out to dry.

'I had to defend myself and the commission against all sorts of idiot plots and I resented that bitterly. In Victoria they saw me as someone who caused problems and who was to be attacked. Every so often over there I'd say to myself, "Why are you getting yourself in a knot? Why don't you just sit back and laugh at all of this?" And I can laugh at a good deal of it now.'

The 'porca Madonna' incident became symbolic of Dunstan's unwillingness to feed with the pack. 'I can't remember a time when I wasn't opposed to people setting on somebody as a gang. When I was a child at the infant school in Murray Bridge there were two children being set upon. One was the only Italian boy in the school at a time when Mussolini was flexing his muscles and it wasn't good to be Italian. I sided with him. He was a nice kid. His name was Tony. And the other was an Aboriginal girl called Shirley Dunn. I resented the way she was treated by the other children.'

As Dunstan settles into retirement, an obvious course would be to write a novel. It seems he already has. 'Nobody wants to publish it,' he says. 'They think it's unfashionable writing and not the sort of conflict-situation stuff that interests contemporary readers. I got the last rejection of about 20 two years ago. I think it's a good book. Having reviewed many books, I think it's a bloody sight better than a lot I had to review.'

Dunstan shows me some of his prized art collections, including a vase made by a celebrated Japanese potter he met. He was asked to loan it to an art gallery. 'I said, "No way, that stays here!" ' he laughs.

Don Dunstan has at last found some peace. He says he has never been a utopian, doesn't believe in 'the religions of the world' and 'I don't believe in an afterlife. Therefore, I hope, for myself and others, a pleasant and fulfilling life'.

When he dies he will just quietly slip away, dust to dust. Is there any fear of old age? 'I don't look forward to a period when I'm not able to look after myself, but I hope I'm not going to reach that stage. People say to me, "You're looking very well," and I say, "Yes, and I'm feeling it, too." Even at my age there's a bit of life in the old dog yet.

'I must confess that when some gorgeous young thing goes

by on the other side of the street sometimes I say to myself, "Oh, to be 60 again."'

*January 1994*

*Don Dunstan died in Norwood, South Australia, in 1999.*

# George Lazenby

While this is most certainly a James Bond sitting on the deck of a massive launch on Sydney Harbour rattling the ice in his orange mineral water, it's certainly not *the* James Bond. It's not the Sean Connery or the Roger Moore or even the Timothy Dalton James Bond. It's the other one. The one they used to call 'an Australian international'. The one that was embalmed in screen history for being Bond just once before walking away. The one who was famous for not being quite famous enough.

'One year I'll come back and do something,' Lazenby says as the birds wheel above us. Some easy-listening muzak plays in the background. It's no wonder Lazenby chooses to return almost every year from his home in Santa Monica to hang out on the harbour. 'Maybe I could make a story about this guy

who came from Queanbeyan and went overseas and became a movie star . . .'

If he did, that story would have a sadness and complexity that few of his acting roles have broached. It would be a tale of the promise of youth gone wrong, of believing the world to be a more forgiving place, of placing faith in the idea that success would breed itself.

Which never happened. Lazenby struggled for years after the Bond film, appearing in a string of barely noticed B-grade action movies and the odd television commercial. He had been frozen out by a handful of Hollywood power brokers and discovered that playing one of the most famous screen characters in history turned out to be sugar laced with arsenic.

He needed a sort of courage to see out those fallow years. And now Lazenby and his American wife are filing for divorce. 'It should have taken place a long time ago,' he says. 'We've been together 24 years. She's still young and beautiful.'

His youthful wilfulness receded as he grew older, and up. George Lazenby seems to have become a much nicer, more complete human being than the one who played James Bond (with whom there were some disturbing behavioural similarities, mainly in respect to sex). It's this grown-up George who had to contend with the most difficult period of his life in the past seven years, watching his son Zachary's brave struggle with a brain tumour. When his son died several months ago, aged 20, Lazenby could say he knew what real courage was.

It is 25 years since Lazenby, a strapping, square-jawed former car salesman from Queanbeyan in Canberra, slipped out of his dinner suit and into something a little more uncomfortable: obscurity. The fame was sometimes hard, but the phone not ringing was worse. That silence deafened him for years.

He would rather the whole Bond thing had not happened quite so quickly. 'I won't be looking to be James Bond in my next life, let me tell you that,' Lazenby says. 'But I did it and I've got to live with it. And I'm enjoying my life.

'You have to be a certain kind of person to enjoy being famous. I think fame is detrimental to your life on this planet. To me it was a kid in a toy shop: "I want that car, Mummy, I want to play with James Bond." That's a powerful dream when you're a little boy. I had that dream. He had the Aston Martin and the girls and the money and the suits and the gadgets and being able to go through any door you want any time. It was a lot of fun.'

Lazenby is 55 now, grey, still handsome and in good physical shape. But he also underscores the slight shock we all feel when we discover that beauty has faded with age. You can still detect the outline of that great set-square jaw, but where's James Bond gone?

It's not middle age that we associate him with. He is eternally fixed in the psyche as a 29-year-old Bond superstud, with a full head of black hair, a roguish grin and a slim, fit body slipping off the excellent white ruffled shirt and the kilt and sliding between the sheets many times in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.

To hear his life story you must strap on your seat belts, for it is a rough ride. It is a story of dumb luck and opportunities grabbed; of an athletic young man on a huge ego trip having his way with many, many women; of a bitterness seeping into his soul soon after his one big break in life; it is a story of a man finally getting to a point where he started to learn to forgive the Hollywood film producers who actively sought to make sure his career, for years, went nowhere.

At 15, Lazenby, whose father worked in the film archive library and whose mother worked at Grace Bros, became a

mechanic, got bored and decided to sell cars instead of fix them.

Restless in Australia, he left for Europe to pursue a modelling career. He got lucky and in 1966 was voted Britain's top male model. He told a newspaper: 'I'm happy it's earned me a Chrysler Barracuda, an Aston Martin, a souped-up Mini and a spanking flat in just over a year.'

But further riches were around the corner. After some months bumming around Paris and swinging London, he met an agent who happened to be looking for the next James Bond. Lazenby bought a suit, had a haircut behind the Dorchester Hotel, where he knew Sean Connery got his cut, and slipped on his Rolex watch.

'I told them I was an actor, a ski instructor, all sorts of bullshit. I'd read the book a couple of days before. The producer was on the phone saying, "We haven't got anyone." Then turned to me and said, "Wait a minute, who are you?" ' When Lazenby scored the big prize, his coup was reported around the world. He had never acted beyond the demands of a chocolate bar commercial, but everything else in his life had gone smoothly, so why not being James Bond?

The 'Aussie Bond', as the papers called him, did a crash course on becoming 007. The producers told him, 'Don't walk like an Australian: walk like Prince Philip'.

'It changed my life completely,' he says of the Bond role. 'I probably didn't handle success and fame the way I should have, but then, I was from Queanbeyan without any understanding of what it was all about. A lot of doors opened. I was surprised at who I could call.

'I remember one day I got asked to call [Aristotle] Onassis for some money for a film, but they [wouldn't] answer the phone. I just picked up the phone and Onassis just came on the line. "James Bond's on the phone." I met him in a restaurant

and introduced the guy to him. I never did much for myself with the fame.'

Amid talk of ungentlemanly behaviour by Lazenby on the Bond set (mainly from his co-star Diana Rigg, who was famous from the TV show *The Avengers*), Lazenby walked away from the next Bond film to pursue other roles. It was a mistake he would always regret. 'I could have listened to better advisers and done another Bond film, and that would have put all the rumours to rest that they threw me out,' he says. 'I didn't have a mind of my own. Today I would have enough sense to say: "Hey, wait a minute, I'm going to do a couple more of these and then see what's out there." But in those days I thought the film business was very big, which it isn't. There's five or six guys running the whole sideshow. And if you upset one of them they call their buddies and you don't work any more, which is what happened to me because I wouldn't do another Bond film. When I tried to get back into the business, even in Europe, they would call up and I would be thrown off pictures. I got a part once [in 1970] and the producer came up and said, "I don't know who you upset, but my agency's going to pull all my actors off unless you go off the film."'

Lazenby considered returning to Australia to sell cars again. He grew his hair long, disavowed material possessions (this stage didn't last too long), called the Bond character 'a brute' and said he'd never play him again. Lazenby was, by this time, a paid-up, card-carrying, reckless playboy, attracting scandal, 'bedding' lots of girls and loving the brouhaha.

He claims he was not invited to attend the premiere of the film and was asked to shave his beard off. The producers said that it was being attended by the Duke and Duchess of Kent and 'if George turns up in slacks and sweater, he will not be allowed in'.

Lazenby replied, 'Conformity is boring.'

In Hollywood, Lazenby was dead meat. His first movie role after Bond, in a film called *Universal Soldier*, was a shambles, and confirmed his questionable judgment.

'It was about a guy who became a pacifist. He had been a mercenary who met a hippie and she changed his way of doing things and he wanted to get out of being a mercenary. Germaine Greer played a female liberation freak. They tried to change the ending around without me being involved. I wouldn't go in the ending where they killed me. I wanted the guy to get away, with the money. So they did it technically with machine-gun fire. It was a disaster.'

It was a damaging career move. 'I knew I had one more shot after Bond, and I chose that and it was the wrong choice. My own fault.'

The bad-mouthing that surrounded Lazenby meant he was not involved in an American film until nine years after Bond, when he 'snuck one in' in Singapore. 'They were out there looking for a guy to play an American senator in a Peter Bogdanovich film [*St Jack*]. I went up for it and got this minor role.'

Down on his luck, Lazenby was watching an action movie and a friend said, 'This is the new rage, this kung fu stuff.'

'It had Singapore distribution on the bottom [credits], so I took a plane out there. I was broke at the time. I went looking for Bruce [Lee], but he was in Hong Kong, so I conned Cathay airlines into giving me a ticket to Hong Kong. I saw him and he wanted to do a movie with me, and then two days later he died.'

Lazenby married an American woman, Chris, with whom he had Zachary, and a daughter, Melanie. He supported himself with an advertising campaign for Benson & Hedges cigarettes ('It was an OK contract,' he says now), buying and selling houses and buying land in the Californian desert,

subdividing and selling it off. 'It was the '80s boom,' he shrugs. 'A lot of people made money.'

But as an actor Lazenby couldn't get arrested. He managed to get some parts in Asian action films being shot in Hong Kong, including *The Man from Hong Kong*. At the time the American and Hong Kong film industries were not connected, so Lazenby could sneak in under the curtain.

Has he forgiven the people who froze him out? 'Sure. I had to learn to forgive people, for anything. I forgive them for everything now. People do things, it comes round and bites them on the arse.'

He hasn't quite forgiven Diana Rigg. The former star of *The Avengers* had such a poor relationship with Lazenby that during the shooting of the Bond film she wrote an open letter to the newspapers detailing Lazenby's alleged behaviour on set. These included three chauffeurs leaving him in one week, producers finding it impossible to meet his demands of 'more money, bigger chauffeur-driven cars, grander apartments etc'.

Rigg wrote: 'Why . . . would one member of the film unit have to be restrained from striking you after one inexcusable and crude outburst against one of the girls on the film?' 'I saw her in Sydney a few years ago,' Lazenby says. 'I ran into her in a hotel. It was: "Hello, how are you?", "I'm fine, see you later."' Did it burn on for years? 'Yeah. She has visions about herself being more than human. We all fart and bleed and give birth, and some people don't think they do, so it makes it hard to relate to people like her.

'I called her a bitch because she kept all the crew sitting out in the cold while she was visibly drinking Champagne with the director in the office while we're all outside waiting, freezing our arses off.'

But the irony was the crew resented Lazenby. 'Yeah. She

came out and got in the car and I said, "You're a bitch, sitting there drinking Champagne like that." She says, "Oh, he's calling me a bitch." I said, "Get in the car and shut up." The thing was we were meant to be having breakfast that day to make up for a little tiff we'd had before. That was off. Her and I could have got along if she understood where I was coming from a bit better. I just wanted to have fun.'

Was that the worst part about making the film? 'No, I was screwing around a lot on the movie. Literally. There were 10 other actresses on there, hotel staff, anything that moved I was trying to f— it. Diana was getting very pissed off at me being like that, you know? She felt I should have better manners.'

There is a scene in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in which Bond, for some reason wearing a kilt and frilly shirt, is high in the Swiss mountains dining with a bevy of Bond girls and their stern female minder, a Teutonic Bond baddie. The young woman next to him reaches up into his kilt and writes her room number on his inner thigh. 'How are you, Mr Bond?' the stern woman asks. 'I feel a certain stiffness coming on,' Bond replies. 'In my shoulder.'

Art, as it turns out, was imitating life. Lazenby's hormones were swinging as wildly as the resort's cable cars, taking young actresses back to his quarters with a vat of gluewein. 'The cast got a mannequin and hung it up outside his door with a sign saying: "George, here's one you missed",' Lazenby recalls. 'Film executive wives would want to meet me secretly and all that stuff. It had more effect on other people than it did on me. You could get away with murder.'

Does he look back and regret some of this reckless movie-star behaviour? 'Well, you can't . . . I kissed everybody off in those days. I was moving on to the next one halfway through the first one. It was what I was born to do at the time; I couldn't have changed it.'

In Lazenby there are large chunks of the unreconstructed playboy. I asked him whether he still felt Australian at all. 'When you live with an American long enough they start to tell you how Australian you are. American women believe in dominating the man, whereas I've come to the conclusion that equality is about as far as I'm prepared to go.'

How does it feel for former sex symbols to turn 55? 'Most women tell me I look better now. I have more women coming on to me now than I did before. Back then, I came on to them. Now, you obviously don't have the sex drive that you had in your twenties, but you start to see what colour their eyes are, what colour hair. You talk to them. It's a deeper, more satisfying sex than it ever was when I was younger.'

He has considered getting out of acting. 'I've thought about it. And just when I do, something comes along.'

What sort of roles would you have ideally liked? 'Roles that Tommy Lee Jones and Harrison Ford get now. I could do those things on my ear. Clint Eastwood roles.'

In the years after Bond, Lazenby hoped people would eventually forget he had played the superspy. 'I've always been lucky, I land on my feet, so I didn't worry about it too much. I parked myself in LA for a while, lived in London, different places, and I never sought work, I never looked for it. I just enjoyed myself with the few bucks I had. I enjoyed these harbours here for a couple of years, and I don't think I worked at all the whole time I was in Australia.'

*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, not as slick as the others and asking the viewer to accept someone other than Sean Connery, was badly reviewed. Today it is regarded with some affection by Bond-philes in Australia. 'I was a lousy actor, but I could always remember my lines,' Lazenby said in 1977. He enrolled in acting classes and now, he says, 'I spend more time fooling around in classes than I do working'. Lazenby fell in

love with acting well after his most famous role. 'I looked at the film the other day in London, and it wasn't that bad,' he says.

All his troubles fell into perspective when his son was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 13. Zachary's illness has been the central fact of Lazenby's life since. Zachary underwent a six-hour operation to remove it. In 1988, Lazenby said, 'Afterwards, when Zac opened his eyes, I said to him, "How do you feel on a scale of one to 10?" because that was our little thing that we had talked about before . . . That was our little plan of numbers. So, when he said a seven, I couldn't believe it. I was so happy.'

Today, Lazenby pauses and fights back tears. He says it taught him a lot about courage. He greatly admired his son and the dignity with which he handled his condition. 'It's too close [to talk about],' he says. 'I break up every time I talk about it. I would like to say, though, he showed me how to die. No fear. He knew he was dying. It was wonderful to see when an intelligent guy like him can face it.'

Lazenby is philosophical about his strange journey. He recognises that much of the interest in him turns on the 'oddity' factor.

Possibly to fuel the 'footnote in history' legend, he reveals, amazingly, that he has never seen the other Bond films. 'It's probably because there's some bad memories with the film I did, and seeing another one might bring those up.' Surely he must have been tempted? 'No. When they're on cable in the States, the kids have said, "Dad, you want to look at this one?" and I say, "No," and I can hear the Bond theme going but I never go in and watch.' The Bond club is indeed an elite one. Only four (Pierce Brosnan is number five) have played the man licensed to kill.

Could there ever be a Bond reunion? 'Yeah, maybe,' Lazenby

laughs. 'It would be hard to get us all together. I've met Sean Connery a couple of times, Roger Moore once a long time ago. Timothy Dalton, yeah, we met at a party; he came up and said, "I've wanted to meet you; there's a lot of stories about you from the crew."' A momentary look of pride flashes across his face. 'Some of my stories have hung on in there.'

*January 1995*

*The only Australian James Bond married American former tennis player Pam Shriver in 2002 after the pair met at a tennis tournament in Australia. In 2004, Lazenby, 64, and Shriver, 41, became parents to George Samuel Lazenby. Lazenby has two adult daughters.*

# Jack Dyer

We drive along Rowena Parade, past the fig trees straining out of 'courtyard gardens', past the sloping corrugated iron roofs and tin fences that now quicken the heartbeat of local real estate agents and once, in the Depression, represented the youth of the residents ground down far too quickly. We wind into narrow little lanes featuring quaint Australiana cottages, like little dolls' houses, their front doors up to your shoulders; one called 'The Cottage', another featuring the appellation 'Gumnut' in its title.

These tiny alleys were once shiny with beer and sometimes blood. These days, late-model Citroens with 'Baby On Board' stickers mount the footpaths. It's now poverty-chic; it used to just be poverty. Richmond has changed so much that Jack Dyer today keeps mentioning the figure $238,000, as though

paying that amount of money for a little cottage still astounds him. Two hundred and thirty-eight thousand, he says. That's what property in Richmond is going for.

We ease around the corners. Dyer looks out the window at the Richmond where he was once king. 'No one knows me in Richmond any more,' he says. 'Just there at the football club.' His old-fashioned hat, a 'grey bludger' he calls it, is perched on his head and Dyer leads us into the heart of Richmond and up onto Richmond Hill.

The mournful and slightly unruly figs start to give way to the sleeker silver birches, standing proudly in well-tended pocket-handkerchief-sized gardens, the corrugated iron making way for white picket fences. Even the graffiti move into the late 20th century, from *The Sporting Globe* and *The Herald* stencilled on J D Langdon's now-derelict milk bar in Alfred Street to spray-painted 'tags' proudly claiming who rules Richmond OK.

Jack Dyer and Richmond. Rarely has the connection between a person, a place and an era been so strong. Driving through Richmond with Dyer is like going on a guided tour of the desert with Lawrence of Arabia.

It resembles taking a huge leap over 60 years to some sort of understanding of what this place was like, what it meant to young men and women who struggled here in the Depression when, it is said, all they had to look forward to was watching the Tigers. Schoolchildren who hate history should be here right now.

Finally, we're in Docker Street, a wide, elevated boulevard from which you can see the Bryant & May chimney reaching over the disused match factory. Dyer introduces himself to a young woman, maybe 20 years old. She knows who Jack Dyer

is, and invites him into the house he lived in for 40 years, where he brought up his two children, where he would sit on the veranda and watch the police raid his next-door neighbour.

'You've got it looking lovely,' Dyer tells the young woman. 'I did what I could here, but I was no carpenter.' At 82, he is still a big man, walking in large purposeful strides. 'The kids lived here for a while,' Dyer says. He looks at me. 'You lose them after a while. You know that, don't you?' He peers out into the terrace garden for a long moment. 'You've upset me now.'

Inside the Richmond changing rooms, a conversation with Dyer about half a century of Richmond is heavy with the power of oral history. He's such a weighty figure it's as though history already owns him. It's like talking to Phar Lap through a glass case, except Dyer is 'quick and lively', as he says, and grabbing my arm for emphasis, picking my microphone up and twisting it round in his hands. Despite knowing I will lose several quotes, I don't quite know how to ask him to put it down.

Sitting on a massage table, Dyer talks about his life. Around us the lockers have been freshly painted, Tiger yellow. He's arrived clutching a bulging scrapbook. 'I brought this in case you were one of the young cadets,' Dyer says. He says his memory is going a bit, mainly for people's names, but otherwise he's fine.

He's so old now it's almost a shock to meet him. At first I didn't recognise him underneath his hat. It's as though he stayed at a certain age for about 20 years, frozen in time with his jug ears and kindly face. And then, in the past few years, he suddenly became an old man.

A few years ago, Dyer was still in the public eye, still doing

his idiosyncratic football calls for 3KZ, still staying up late to appear with Lou Richards and Bob Davis on *League Teams*. Still a cult figure. Still quoted. 'Spaghetti marijuana'. '. . . his arms reaching up like giant testicles', 'French Riverina', 'Things aren't the same now there are five teams in the four', 'He made a great debut today and an even better one last week'. Not being able to pronounce DiPierdomenico. A much-loved figure with a beautiful rhythm to his speech, the poetry of the imprecise, only partly conscious of why he was so loved.

And then he kind of slipped away. No more radio, no more TV; even interviews and appearances are rare. 'I'm a refusal man,' he says. 'I don't like going out much.'

Yet, today he gives me three hours, enough talk to tire a man half his age. And the best place to start is how he came to be loved in Richmond and feared elsewhere, how he made his name in a place to which, according to Janet McCalman's Richmond history *Struggletown*, 'the Depression came early, finished late and damaged the physical and social fabric of the suburb for decades to come'.

To understand the tribalism of inner Melbourne in the 1930s – enemies were made across borders that we hardly bother to pinpoint today – it needs to be understood that football was the one and only escape from the grimness of life on the bread line. The Depression of the early 1930s had hit Richmond harder than almost anywhere. Twenty-eight per cent of the men in its workforce were unemployed. Families who couldn't pay the rent were sometimes turfed out on the street. Often there was not enough food.

'An army of outcasts had suddenly appeared,' McCalman writes, 'not carrying leprosy or syphilis but poverty. And if they didn't have the cash to play football they'd wreck the games of those who had . . .'

Richmond stuck with its own. 'It was a sort of a closed

shop,' Dyer says. 'We were locked in. The Yarra that side. Punt Road that side. North Richmond and Victoria Street the other side. Anyone come over to us from Collingwood, they were out the moment they crossed Victoria Street. And they took it a bit like that in those days, too, those young fellers who had nothing to do, they'd drive them back again.

'That seemed to be their enjoyment, not that I was mixed up because I wasn't like that.

'There were a few scoundrels, but if they wanted to fight they'd go over to Collingwood and get it out of their systems, then Collingwood might come here and get it out of their systems. There wasn't much to do, there was no television, that's why there were so many good footballers around. But there were mobs in Richmond, Carlton, Collingwood, sometimes they'd get over-enthusiastic and challenge each other and they'd all meet on the corner of Lennox Street, all into it.

'I kept away, didn't want to fight. If you started a fight, you never knew how it was going to finish; there were pickets pulled off the fence and everything. You'd be walking home and all these fence pickets would be strewn around.'

In the 1930s and 40s, Dyer was to Richmond what Don Bradman was to the whole country. He was what Wayne Carey would be today if there were no computers, no television, no VCRs, no movies, no surfing, no soccer, no casino, no rock-'n'roll and no economic freedom. Dyer was a god you didn't mess with, someone to talk about, something to behold.

'If you were playing football you were sort of king of the town,' Dyer recalls. 'A few of the blokes lived out a bit. I lived in the middle [of Richmond], used to walk home from the football. I lived in Fraser Street for years. The main recreation of a Friday was a walk up Bridge Road to Punt Road and walk back again. You can imagine, they're all Richmond supporters, I used to love it, take two hours to do it, take my

minder with me. You'd see a little mob on the corner: "Hey, Jack, howya goin?" ' They'd be lookin' for a fight at that stage, about seven of them waiting in a doorway, waiting for a fight. "It's Jack, let him go." A very compact little town.'

In the '30s the football was the last entertainment working men could afford. The second-last was a beer in the pub. 'Men might give up beer and tobacco but they could never give up the Tigers,' writes McCalman.

The football side was full of 'desperate men', according to Dyer, and this showed on the scoreboard, too. The Tigers, with Jack 'Skinny' Titus and Dyer as the stars, won three premierships during the Depression, losing grand finals to Collingwood three times in that era, and fuelling a hatred that may only now be slightly receding, edged into irrelevance by the football dominance of the Eagles, a team 3500 kilometres across the desert in Perth.

'Collingwood had a beautiful side in '29,' Dyer says. 'Richmond hated them. You were taught to hate a side. Especially Collingwood.'

He remembers his very early days at the club, paid £3 a week, nervous and shivering on the bench when he was 17. 'They were a beautiful side. All veterans, all hard workers, no mercy, no mercy at all and, ooh, they looked after me: "Don't touch the kid." I can hear them all saying it now. They were all nice guys, credit that, but get 'em on a football field, there's a touch of madness about them. They were all lovely, all married.

'In those days you could go up the bush and grab a champion. You couldn't imagine that now; now you've got to go over to Western Australia. Me and Graeme Richmond used to go on the "scone run", recruiting. I was the front man, I used to knock on the door, I was with the television and they were all just getting television at that stage, too . . . I couldn't talk

but he was a beautiful baloney merchant. We picked up some beautiful footballers – Dick Clay, Royce Hart, all that mob who won the premiership.'

Dyer had come to Richmond when his mother put him on a bus at Yarra Junction. He was 12.

'I got my merit [certificate] at 12, usually you got it at 14, so Mum thought I was going to be a professor. Worst thing I ever did. My mother thought I was going to be anything, sent me to town from Yarra Junction. We had an auntie who lived right opposite the town hall. I knew nothing about town. I'd met the train every night at Yarra Junction to get the *Herald*s to sell 'em. They just plonked me on a bus and they said to the driver: "Put him orf at Lennox Street."' Dyer's family then followed him down from Yarra Junction and struggled along with everyone else in Richmond.

'It was called Struggletown a bit,' Dyer says. 'We got along all right, when you think of it, we lived pretty well. Dad was battlin' around, but I got him a job on the council, very nice. Once you get on the council you were right forever. He was there until he died. He loved his football and everything like that. We weren't sort of real close. I suppose it all depends on how you look at it. We weren't loving or anything like that. It was: "Son, what are you doing? What are you up to?" All that business. Nothing. And that'd be the conversation.

'He loved anyone who could talk, too. I always remember the first time he took me to hear the little feller who was prime minister talk, what was his name? [James Scullin.] He lived in Richmond. "Silvery voice" they used to call him. He walked into the town hall, it was packed, they hooted him and hooted him and he got goin' and he talked in trillions and millions, ooh, beautiful, took full control in about five minutes and they all stood up and gave him a standing ovation. I was only about 16 then and Dad said: "Anyone who can talk, that's

what talk can do to you. Gives you standing, anyone who can get up and have a talk."'

Dyer brought prestige and a little money to the family. His mother realised that others were less well-off and helped them out. Loyalty to families in the same street was as important as loyalty to the football team.

'This is where Richmond was such a beauty. If you didn't have something, the people next door had something. It went along every street, people helping out. They'd push back, too, if they got a big lift-up or something.

'All the country kids [who came to play with Richmond] . . . I used to fall in with them a bit because I came from the country. They'd only be 17. I used to take 'em all home for dinner. Get there about three o'clock of a Sundee, Mum'd say nothin' at all, it was only scrambled eggs and bacon, but it was something to eat, you know. She was happy to see us. When I think of it, things were on the line, you know. I don't know whether she had much money or not at all, she was more cunnin' than I thought, though, just the same, my mother.

'She said to me one day, she said, "I bought you a house." I said, "You what? Whereabouts?" She said, "Next door." I said, "Where'd you get the money from?" She said, "The money you've been giving me; I've been putting it away." It wasn't a big house, but today they're $238,000, the same one.

'I paid £200 for that one. I bought seven more after that. When she started me, I kept going.'

It was round the halfway mark of the nine opponents' collarbones he broke that he became known as 'Captain Blood'. He was the embodiment of the rough Depression footballer. He played with all the grit and grime and violence of the streets around the Punt Road Oval and it's difficult to reconcile that violence with such a gentle old man, but he won't apologise for it today: it was just like that then and you took it, and he

especially liked hurting the middle-class Melbourne Football Club players.

'We used to take 'em orf a bit. We didn't like 'em because they looked down on us. Ooh, God, yes, looked down right on us. We were the rabble from Richmond, and we didn't take kindly to it. They were public-school. I went off the ground once and said, "I think I've killed this feller." They'd taken him off on a stretcher, put blankets over him and, oh God. He hadn't moved and Dr Cordner had had a look and there was hell to pay. I said, "I think I've killed this feller," and a Richmond man said, "Don't worry about that, it's only manslaughter. I'll get you off for nothin'." That's how Richmond worked.

'I visited a bloke [an opponent he'd put in hospital] once. I never visited again: I ran into his wife. Did she give me a nice time! I went in to see how he was, the only one I ever did that to, too.'

Dyer worked as a policeman for 10 years, during which time, he says, he learned valuable lessons about dealing with people, about communicating. Besides, it was better than his other jobs, packing tea and gardening.

'It was the best thing ever happened to me. Put a stone on me shoulders and a bit of confidence, a bit of standover tactics. You learn how to talk to people. You can find out a bloke's weakness. You learn how to get on top of 'em, or be nice to 'em. Very valuable.'

When Jack Dyer and Lou Richards were TV stars, it was because they were unconsciously, haphazardly funny. The new kings, Eddie McGuire and Sam Newman, know very well why football is funny. They spout the old guard's clichés with tongue in cheek. Jack and Lou meant them.

Dyer lived in South Vermont for a few years, and has now moved to Frankston, where he boards with a widower. He still drives to town himself.

The Dyer family also has a house at Rye on the Mornington Peninsula, where Dyer fishes with his nephews. His daughter Jill's son plays football for Vermont. 'He's six foot four and he can run like a deer,' Dyer says.

He did miss Richmond when he moved out, but he also enjoyed the isolation. 'I'm 80, I'm going on bloody 90, which is not a bad job just to be goin' on. I reckon I've done enough.'

His wife of more than 30 years, Sybil, died in 1971. 'It was a tragedy for us,' he says. 'We were just gettin' on our feet after battlin' and battlin' and battlin'. The Mother Superior said: "It happens to a lot at this age, just bang, there they go." She was at the age where they go or they stop.'

He loves Richmond Football Club more than ever. He collects his scrapbook and puts it in the boot of his car. 'I don't sleep for a week if we get beat,' he says. He laughs. 'I should be over that.'

Does he fear death? 'No. I'm one of the ones who are going to live forever.'

*April 1995*

*Jack Dyer died in August 2003.*

# Graham Kennedy

Here's a Graham Kennedy moment: one night, dining alone in a restaurant, a young boy came over to Kennedy's table and began talking to him. The boy told Kennedy about his divorced parents and an operation his father had recently survived. The boy then asked if he could bring his little brother over to the table. Soon, their mother also came by to ask if she could bring the kids' dinner over. 'I was a bit surprised,' Kennedy later recalled. 'But I said yes. Before I realised what I was doing, I was ordering them to eat their beans and carrots. It turned into a very nice evening.'

Anyone who has ever felt even a passing affection for Kennedy or his humour would be smiling at this point. The moment, related in Graeme Blundell's new biography, *King, The Life and Comedy of Graham Kennedy*, is illustrative. It has

the 'recluse' eating alone, it juxtaposes him awkwardly with strange creatures that he ordinarily had little to do with (children), and it sets an often volatile and unpredictable star – probably the biggest showbusiness figure Australia has produced – in the most mundane, and unexpectedly fatherly, of situations.

The story reinforces one popular image of Kennedy (his loneliness) and contradicts another (he might have been expected to give the kid the brush-off). And it goes to the heart of the ultimate Kennedy conundrum: few, if any, can claim really to know him.

People have known bits of him. Some knew the volcanic perfectionist with the cruel streak towards lesser talents, others the insecure and frightened loner. Some saw the ribald prankster, others the quietly spoken, sometimes sentimental and respectful boy from Balaclava.

Many experienced his tenacious loyalty, a caring and generous friend; others were surgically removed. He displayed his money with his Rolls-Royce, but the working-class Depression boy kept a canister of pencils perfectly sharpened in his living room as a reminder of the days when his family couldn't afford such luxuries.

There are all sorts of Graham Kennedys. He was nervy, aggressive and merciless. He was insecure and privately self-effacing but would boast on air about the 'cartloads of cash' he was earning and the fact that GTV-9 gave him a chauffeur-driven Mercedes. He was only ever at home when the camera was on him, but in 40 years he never lost the terror of walking onstage. He was mobbed and adored but had no one to go home to, though in later years there have been Clydesdale horses and a golden retriever.

He was acerbic, modern and dapper, but he watched *The Waltons*. 'You know *The Waltons*?' he once asked a journalist.

'Corny, sloppy, bordering on mawkish? You know this old style of American family series? Well, I sit there and cry.'

All sorts of Kennedys. And Blundell spent eight years trying to track down as many of them as he could.

'*Heeeeeeere's Graham!*' Kennedy, the 'slender young comedian whose skin was the colour of talcum powder', had been buzzing and fizzing in Blundell's mind long before he started his marathon project in 1994. Like many of his generation (he is 57), Blundell had been captivated by the 'quick, wiry body, fast mouth, bulbous fish eyes and gymnastic hips' of the early Kennedy. As a child, he marvelled at the young Kennedy's wit on radio 3UZ. In 1956, when he burst onto black-and-white screens, it was Kennedy's remarkable facility for television that amazed.

Kennedy was restless and subversive, explosive and honest. 'I know what you're thinking,' he would tell an audience. 'Graham's stuffed that up.' Or: 'I knew I should never have started that – you all knew I had nowhere to go, didn't you?' Television in this country had only just been born, and already he was deconstructing it.

Kennedy was dangerous at a time when safety was the orthodoxy adhered to by most comedians. He showed us the wires and innards of television instead of pandering to its mythologies. He addressed his producer standing in the wings, he highlighted and satirised his own flaws, a pioneer of the now-commonplace habit of a comic saving a bad line by being seen to do so.

He scolded producers on-air, he even mocked the audience, the lifeblood. 'You didn't want to laugh, did you?' he would sometimes ask his studio audience quite aggressively. 'It wasn't very funny, was it?' He made an audience enjoy feeling

foolish and sheep-like well before Dame Edna Everage made a career out of it.

Most cardinal of his sins, he was rude about the products he was endorsing. The blood would drain from the faces of Pelaco shirt-wearing executives in television, advertising and business until they realised that instead of televisual suicide, this skinny little wiseguy was commercial gold. And then they liked his brand of humour a lot.

On the best nights of *In Melbourne Tonight*, Blundell writes, his energy was 'limitless and breathtaking'. He would dance onto the set, 'the audience erupting at his appearance', falling backwards, falling forwards, doing a soft-shoe shuffle. Sometimes 'he would shimmy forwards right up to the camera and kiss it. Or just tumble in it, a catastrophic moment for his viewers'.

He creamed other comics, made them look like triers. Colleague Noel Ferrier says, 'He moved through the crowd of the rest of us like a liner through tugs.'

'Melbourne had never seen live television like it,' Blundell writes of *IMT* and the simpatico between Kennedy and Bert Newton at its heart. 'The viewer didn't quite know who to look at, there was so much happening. They piggy-backed each other, riding and jumping like monkeys, pushed the sets over, upended the desk, punched and slapped, chased into the audience and threw boxes of products at each other.'

It was a mix of slapstick, vaudeville and English-postcard naughtiness. But it was all underpinned by Kennedy's intelligence and feigned innocence: he was the little boy lost gone bad, and that's why 'the anaemic little chap' had such an impact.

'He understood,' writes Blundell, 'implicitly at this stage, that creative comedy did not reside in the field of gags and jokes . . . comedy was in character and character grew out of an understanding of the way people behaved and pretended.'

He was a master of a medium he appeared to hold in contempt. The best thing about television, he said, was the free haircuts and wine. He didn't really need TV, but TV needed him.

They say you can't control someone who has no fear, as Nine's then owner, Sir Frank Packer, found out. Packer sent a telex to him once, saying, 'Will meet you tomorrow at the Australia Hotel.' Kennedy responded, 'Busy tomorrow, try next week.'

But being cavalier was different from being cruel. Once, acting with Ray Barrett in *Don's Party*, Kennedy reacted badly to Barrett's jokiness on set. Barrett made a light remark to Kennedy just before shooting. 'Look, f— off, Ray,' Kennedy said. They barely talked again.

Kennedy once wrote a letter to a television executive confirming his reputation for volatility and apologising in advance for future outbursts.

'He often referred to the cruel streak,' Blundell says. 'He said he was a perfectionist and the quality of the work he desired meant he was forced to be cruel, particularly to people he felt weren't doing their job.'

In the Sydney boardroom of his publisher, Blundell is talking Kennedy. Even after eight years on the job, his subject still delights him. Sometimes Blundell gets up from his chair to illustrate a point, usually about Kennedy's physical comedy, or routines he would do at home to small gatherings of friends. Blundell shares an anecdote that didn't make the cut. Maybe one for part two, he says. If the best biographers need to be in love with their subjects, he would seem to be very well placed.

The paths of Kennedy and Blundell crossed sporadically over the years. They knew each other as Sydney actors, but were not close friends. An idea to do a biography on a man who had led such a rich and fascinating life had been kicking

around in Blundell's head for years. Writing about Kennedy would, after all, be like writing about the best bits of the start of Australian television. It was a symbiosis the former star Melbourne University history student (he won a history prize studying under historian and author Inga Clendinnen) could not resist.

Besides, Blundell knew a lot of the people he hoped to interview, not to mention a lot of the stories. He just had to get people to sit down and tell them into a tape recorder instead of over a beer at the pub.

Blundell was able to tap into his personal knowledge of Kennedy after working with him on two feature films, *Don's Party* and *The Odd Angry Shot*. Kennedy seemed to have more respect for film than television, and enjoyed playing alongside veterans such as Barrett and John Hargreaves. 'He would always turn it into the Graham Kennedy show at some point,' Blundell says. 'He would give little crits on our performance at the end of each take. He'd say: "Was that good? I think Hargreaves was best, but Blundell, that wasn't bad; as for you, [Bryan] Brown, woo hoo." We just delighted in him.'

Kennedy once wrote to Blundell. In the letter, Kennedy talked about his own work in the film of David Williamson's *The Club* (he played the pompous club president). 'As for me, you can select any of the following descriptions: "adequate", "hopelessly miscast", "lacklustre", or "had no conception of the character he was playing".'

Blundell appeared on Kennedy's raucous late-1970s Channel 10 vehicle *Blankety Blanks* a couple of times. The show was something of a TV comeback for Kennedy, bringing together a crop of TV gents and ladies – Barry Creighton, Noeline Brown, Noel Ferrier, Ugly Dave Gray – for a nightly dose of double entendre.

It was during this time that Blundell scored an invitation to

Kennedy's Sydney home for dinner. Like others who'd been invited temporarily into Kennedy's life, he remembers a charming host. 'He came and saw me in the *Blankety Blanks* dressing room before [taping], got me a drink, was terribly nice and polite. His driver picked us up after the show, the dinner was all organised and we went out on his boat.

'His bodyguard drove up and down the Hawkesbury River, down to the heads. We were totally pissed by this stage. We rescued some blokes whose boat had sunk. The bodyguard didn't want to rescue them, but Graham insisted. The bodyguard was saying they might be kidnappers. It was a bizarre night.'

Kennedy's life was an Aladdin's cave of stories, waspish observations and Wildean put-downs. A biography should be a cinch. But anyone who knew Kennedy knew it would never be that easy. Being an occasional drinking partner was one thing. Shoe-horning the man's life into a book was another. Little wonder Blundell describes the process as painful. 'I became quite depressive about it at times,' he says. 'I wasn't sure I was going to be able to do it.'

Blundell kept working as an actor (many plays), director (the ABC's *Medivac* among many projects) and writer (features and book reviews for newspapers and magazines) over the period. He worked on the book when he could.

Kennedy never spoke to him. By the time Blundell launched the project, his subject had gone to ground. He did the occasional interview – he spent a day with me in 1985 at his home in Sydney's Hunters Hill, he gave an interview to Ray Martin 14 years later, he faxed off some answers to others – but he wasn't available for Blundell's book.

Neither, critically, was Bert Newton, who may well claim to know Kennedy better than anyone. It was a wonderful act they had: put-upon, exasperated Bert and menacing Feldman-

esque Graham, always looking for the sort of trouble where laughs reside.

Newton wasn't comfortable talking. 'He was absolutely charming,' Blundell says. 'He declined with the greatest of regrets, "I'm sure you'll understand".'

Kennedy shut down several close friends and former colleagues by saying, 'I'd rather you didn't [talk], but it's up to you'. He passed on his best wishes but declined to be involved, 'for no particular reason,' his agent said, 'other than he believes he has a limited memory of many of the facts of his life'.

Happily for Blundell, Kennedy had touched the lives of many over the years. There was much to draw on. Everyone had a Graham story. And most were willing to share them.

Blundell thought he had a fix on his subject: the idea that he was a strange, lonely recluse had long taken hold among Kennedy watchers. Even back in the 1960s Kennedy was, according to his mentor Bob Dyer, 'the most devoted youngster I have ever met. He eats and sleeps TV'. He added, 'He is probably the loneliest young man in Australia.'

Indeed, it was the theme Blundell took into his writing and research. But that changed when former TV producer and Kennedy neighbour Tony Sattler started to help Blundell. Sattler and his wife, comedian Noeline Brown, found a property in rural NSW for Kennedy and became like family.

'I made some false steps until Tony Sattler came back on the scene,' Blundell says. 'I thought he was reclusive, difficult. But Sattler said he's solitary. He just loves his life. Tony told me Graham would be at their place having dinner and drinking when Graham was still driving – the four-wheel-drive he got for doing the interview with Ray Martin – always contra, the king of contra.

'Graham would say, "It's twenty to six, I'll be home at six, they've [the dogs] got to be fed at six". So he'd go home, cook

the meal and the animals would have the same meal he'd have, and he'd take it out on a tray.'

The people to whom Blundell spoke were universal in the idea that Kennedy was the most intriguing person they'd worked with. His brilliance as a performer was beyond question. But Blundell came to know a Kennedy with strange quirks.

He remembers bumping into the late Noel Ferrier at a supermarket in Sydney, in shorts and singlet, smoking a huge cigar. 'He said to me, "He's a c—, Kennedy. F—ing meanest c—".' Joff Ellen had just died and he said Graham rang Channel Nine and said, 'Are you sending flowers to Joff's funeral? Just stick my name on the list, will you?'

Kennedy's solitariness has been much discussed. Details of his private life have been hinted at, but Kennedy has rarely spoken of his sexuality. Blundell quotes Tommy Hanlon Junior, an American regular on *IMT* and a close friend. 'People always asked me whether he was homosexual,' Hanlon said. 'I think I knew him about as well as anybody. I never saw him with any man or any woman. I thought he was a carrot – he didn't like boys, he didn't like girls, he didn't like dogs. He had absolutely no sexual personality whatsoever; he was just a carrot.'

Blundell didn't delve in this area; he felt the type of reader the book was aimed at didn't have to know. Besides, 'there was so little to chase. And it didn't seem particularly appropriate. It may have been bordering on the tawdry. There wasn't all that much sexual play in his life. He spent his whole career exhausted.'

In recent years, Kennedy has been in decline physically. There were 'two bad falls in six months, diabetes, no daily exercise other than hugging his Clydesdales, shooing Henry the Golden Retriever, lifting several glasses of red wine and four packs of cigarettes a day,' writes Blundell.

Noeline Brown said it was as though Kennedy were smoking for the Olympics. At a suggestion he give up, Kennedy said, 'Up that.'

Now friends say Kennedy may never leave hospital. While it's too early for obituaries, the release of the book is a good opportunity for another generation to attempt to understand and appreciate Kennedy's significance.

'A lot of people who have not experienced the Kennedy stuff still think of him as a rather crumby kind of comic, you know, smutty,' Blundell says. 'They don't see the subversive thing. There's a lot more behind the work than instantly comes to the eye. There's a lifetime of mockery and derision and deconstruction.'

Blundell was able to gain insights into the life Kennedy lived at his property at Canyonleigh, near Bowral, before he was admitted to hospital. In the dining area of his house, with its massive windows, Sattler and Brown would gather with Kennedy. Kennedy would leave the room and the pair would watch as he took out his teeth and leered through the window from the balcony outside, like a hunchbacked old man.

There are photos of Kennedy, Sattler and Brown with Kennedy's beloved Clydesdale horses, an animal for which he has had a fondness since childhood. Kennedy would sometimes go and eat in one of the local restaurants, usually wearing a hat or a beanie as disguise. He had a strong relationship with a local butcher, who would invite Kennedy to the back of the shop for a coffee whenever he came in.

Kennedy's housekeeper, Sally Baker-Beall, tells of Kennedy performing routines for her. 'There wasn't a day when you didn't come away from his place with your face tired and sore from laughing,' she says.

When Dave the Clydesdale died, a neighbour used a tractor to bury him. Unfortunately, the dog tried to dig up Dave in

the soft soil. Baker-Beall, in tears, told Kennedy. 'Look, Henry's digging up Dave.'

'Oh good,' Kennedy said. 'I'd like to see him again.'

Kennedy's ill health has left him facing a pile of large hospital bills that Sattler and Brown worry will cripple him financially. Happily, an 'angel', believed to be former Channel Nine executive Sam Chisholm, heard about Kennedy's plight and deposited $150,000 into his bank account.

'He never got rich,' Blundell says. 'He never owned the show, like Bob Dyer did. Channel Nine had the rights. I thought he would be wealthier, and it was a sad surprise. You have a year of not working and you are accustomed to good wine and it goes pretty quickly.'

Still, he can't quite be sure of Kennedy's situation. 'That was one of the problems of doing an unauthorised biography; there is no way of finding these things out.'

Blundell does know, though, that he was shocked at Kennedy's decline. 'I was fascinated with how Graham got old so quickly. Noeline [Brown] said he embraced old age early on.'

Blundell sent Kennedy some chapters of an early draft, but when asked, he declined to see any more. Was he interested in how he will be remembered? 'After the Ray Martin documentary,' Blundell says, 'Kennedy rang Sattler and said, "It went quite well, I thought. I got some letters which have been forwarded on. Isn't it nice to still be remembered?" I can only guess that his illnesses have been so severe in different ways that it hasn't been of much importance to him.'

If Blundell had been able to interview Kennedy, he would have asked about his childhood. 'I became obsessed with trying to find out, because he was so protective of his childhood throughout his career and spoke about it in such a guarded, comic way. It was tinged with hurt and disappointment and disillusionment.'

Here is another Graham Kennedy moment: in the late 1990s, Kennedy came down to Melbourne to see Bert Newton. While he was in town, he got on the city-circle tram and did two runs around Melbourne, by himself.

Again, there are huge echoes in this story. This is the man who surfaced in Melbourne, a comic hurricane initially spurned in Sydney. ('When he smiles,' wrote one Sydney critic, 'his lips curl into what seems a repulsive sneer, his eyes seem permanently about to pop out of their sockets'.)

This is a man whose comic skills were forged listening to the radio in Balaclava, Melbourne's first real showbusiness royalty (even though he was dismissive of his nickname The King), a man, Blundell writes, they called the God of Melbourne's Channel Nine.

This is Graham Kennedy taking one last long look at where it all began.

*May 2003*

*It's 20 years ago that Graham Kennedy gave me a day of his time for an interview. He showed me his Hunters Hill house, he made coffee and was a most courteous and fascinating host. I'd grown up hearing stories about this hilarious guy called Gra-gra on* In Melbourne Tonight. *Being in Grade One when he was at the height of his powers, I was too young to experience the Kennedy magic live, but I've seen many hours of Kennedy's work over three decades and my admiration for and fascination with his nervy comic energy has not subsided.*

*Today Kennedy makes no public appearances and lives in a nursing home in Bowral. In 2002 Kennedy fractured his skull and suffered a brain haemorrhage in a fall. Doctors believed he had two days to live. With the help of close friends Tony Sattler and Noeline Brown, he survived.*

# Jana Wendt

On a sunny Sydney afternoon, Jana Wendt settles into a couch at a bar in Double Bay. The usually media-shy Wendt has come to talk about *Witness*, and there's an anger and a determination in her tone. While, at one point, she says, 'It's only television' and 'Life is short', she is at war, and the battle she's fighting appears to be as significant as the future of quality current affairs on commercial TV.

'I am quite happy to fight for it,' Wendt says. And those who watched her scuffles with management at the Nine Network – particularly the 'debates' she had with the man she calls 'big Kerry' – know she's not kidding. They also remember that television's 'perfumed steamroller', one of the industry's rare 'marquee names', usually gets what she wants. And now it's the Seven Network's turn to find this out.

'I think we are very important to the future of current affairs,' she says. 'If we don't make it work, the victory flag will go up on the wrong side of the current affairs line. It will say that current affairs is really better off being relegated to entertainment than to entertaining information . . .

'I would hate to see *Witness* go down, because some of those that scoff at the notion of doing a quality current affairs program on commercial television would have the last laugh. And I would hate that to happen.'

Wendt's history as a journalist who likes getting her own way is well known from her days at *A Current Affair*, where she once walked out on the show for two days after she unwittingly presented a report on a hardware store that featured topless women as sales staff. Wendt won that battle. Never again while she was at the desk did *ACA* run a story to which she had strong objections.

Now it is those at *Witness* who underestimate Wendt's will at their peril, as Peter Manning has found out. Manning, the executive producer who had come from the ABC, having created *Attitude*, *Lateline* and *Foreign Correspondent*, was removed from *Witness* to oversee the development of Seven's overall current affairs ('Kicked upstairs is how I'd put it,' he says now). Why? Because, he says, 'Jana has enormous commercial power based, by the way, on her time on *A Current Affair* and *60 Minutes*. If it was a choice for the network between Jana Wendt and Peter Manning, I had no chance whatsoever. Who do you think the advertisers would regard as more important?'

*Witness* has become the TV industry's most intense talking point. The clash of egos and wills has been hinted at in the press, but the extent of the ill feeling and frustration that characterised the program's first year can only now be revealed.

What emerges, on one side, is a portrait of an executive producer, Peter Manning, losing the support of most of the

program's staff and fighting against Wendt, TV's biggest star, assuming the title managing editor, which she hoped would formalise her capacity to have some editorial input. And, on the other side, the presenter and reporter, Jana Wendt, finding herself at odds with Manning, calling in lawyers to examine her contract, and embroiled in possibly the most bitter struggle of her professional life.

'Disagreements' between Manning and Wendt even prompted a senior *Witness* reporter, Paul Barry, to weigh in to the debate in a letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald* that took issue with Wendt's views. In defence of the show's direction and an obvious swipe at the host, Barry wrote: 'The battle is not, as Jana Wendt would have it, between quality and trash. Everyone at *Witness* is committed to quality journalism. But most also accept that it is essential to attract a significant audience.'

Wendt is known to have been bemused by Barry's letter and will say only this: 'I know that the last words of Paul's letter were "Let's get on with it", and I suggest that is what we do.'"

Two weeks ago, Wendt gave an interview to *The Sydney Morning Herald* saying she 'wasn't hired to do *60 Minutes* Mark 2' and that she had had 'disagreements' with Manning about the direction of the program. There had also been 'creative tension'. She referred to taking the definition of current affairs back to its 'original meaning'.

Several respected ABC journalists, including Monica Attard and Chris Masters, were moved to write a sharp letter to the paper suggesting that 'we do not believe that Peter Manning would need to be reminded, by anyone, of "the original meaning" of quality television current affairs.'

The battle for *Witness* has turned into something larger: the program has become a test case, not only for Wendt's pulling power but for the style of show she is seeking to present. And

the only reason people believe it has a chance of succeeding where others failed (remember *Page One*, even Wendt's own experiment, *On Assignment*) is the host herself.

The might of Wendt's clout in the industry – both with skittish executives and network advertisers – has been tested in the past few weeks as she continues to question many of the assumptions of current affairs television. So far, Wendt's power remains intact, as do her views on current affairs, which have not changed since she left Nine, speaking dismissively of their programs.

'Current affairs television is, by and large, not current affairs television,' she says now. 'It is an entirely orchestrated event . . . [Stories] are created, they are created almost on the spot. In other words, they are stunts or gimmicks . . . That is no longer current affairs; it is something, it is a spectacle or an entertainment, but it is not current affairs.'

Wendt is undoubtedly planning to fight this to the end. And, with the departure of Peter Manning, she appears to have won the battle, if not the war. The Seven Network knows how much it has invested in this program: not just the $13 million a year to make it, but something far more important to network executives – reputation. Seven, with an inglorious record in current affairs, is as reluctant to see it fail as Wendt is.

The show began in much calmer circumstances. When its birth was announced, it was meant to be the dawning of a new age of 'real' current affairs journalism on commercial television. No 'reporter as star' *60 Minutes* stuff, no near-death-experiences-type stories that *A Current Affair* trades in, no confrontation for its own sake that *Frontline* had so savagely parodied. It was a test: could a commercial network, with all the demands for ratings and revenue, present a fearless 'quality' program?

Wendt believed so. Bored and disenchanted, she left her comfort zone at Nine to find out (even if her reported $2 million salary was still pretty comfortable).

*Witness* began with a flood of goodwill, but the smiles were soon gone. Even as early as the second episode, friction between Manning and others in the *Witness* team was becoming apparent. The reason was a story from America's NBC in which Jane Pauley interviewed the mother whose seven-year-old pilot daughter, Jessica Dubroff, was killed in a crash. 'It was a wishy-washy suck job,' says a *Witness* insider. 'Not one question that a decent journalist would ask got asked of her, like why she allowed her seven-year-old daughter to fly a plane.'

Manning, who today defends that piece, saying it was 'interesting, not brilliant', was perceived to be taking the program downmarket, away from the promised brief. Manning was keen to lead the show with lighter pieces, as, he says, a newspaper does with a picture story on page one. Wendt disliked this trend, feeling the more serious story should headline the show.

Relations between Wendt and Manning began to sour. 'It started at program three,' Manning says, 'when Jana and [producer] Gareth Harvey went to Israel for a story on the Israeli bombing of Lebanon, on the understanding that the item be 13 minutes long. They insisted it be 20 minutes. Jana had done an excellent job, but in my view it should not have run the length they insisted it did.

'That is a classic role of an executive producer – to make a cooler judgment back home with the local audience in mind, to a reporter and producer in the field. That was represented by Gareth Harvey as my lack of commitment to quality journalism. My view was that the story was, after 15 minutes, too boring and it had a big audience turn-off.'

Wendt tells it differently. 'We were going into Lebanon when there was friction between Lebanon and Israel, and it was an extremely dangerous situation. We discussed at length the pros and cons of doing such a story, sending a crew into such a dangerous spot. As it happened, we were one of two crews at the Cana United Nations base in Lebanon when it was bombed and about 100 people were killed, a most remarkable event to cover.

'I had secured interviews with senior people in the Israeli and Lebanese governments. Having gone through this experience, I was told it was to run 10 minutes. Having been asked to get every possible facet of the story and then to be told it was 10 minutes was rather a blow.'

Other reporters felt the same way. One had been lured to *Witness* with the expectation the program would be exploring serious matters. He was soon doing a story on performing animals, on the back of the film *Babe* with its 'talking' pigs. The story was, well, a dog, as the reporter told Manning, who was unmoved and demanded that the shooting continue. 'It was the most demoralising experience of my professional life,' the reporter says of the story that never aired.

After complaining to Manning, the reporter found himself quite upset in the corridor one day when Wendt walked past and asked what was wrong. 'I said, "I keep getting put on crap and he tells me I'm the only one complaining. He even asked me if there was anything wrong with my personal life." Jana said, "You're not the only one – I'm complaining too." '

It turned out a deep disenchantment pervaded the floor. Anti- or pro-Manning cliques developed. Staff today say it was amazing there wasn't a more poisonous atmosphere. The mutual aim to produce something better than other current affairs shows held the group together.

But the 'grand vision', as the staff had come to call *Witness*,

was in trouble. One reporter said of Manning: 'The problem with Peter is that he doesn't know that between serious and tabloid there's a middle course. He came from the ABC and dived straight into the gutter.'

When the end came, after a failed attempt by Manning to rally troops in his support against management sacking him, it was bitter and nasty. Manning called a meeting for 2.30 and made a farewell speech.

A reporter recalls: 'He said the decision had been made to let him go. He then launched into this extraordinary personal attack on [Wendt], that she had cynically used her commercial pulling power to launch an unprincipled coup against him, and all it was was a demonstration of her power against his, and that he had to go.'

A staff member who interrupted Manning to say, 'I do hope Jana will have a chance to respond to all this,' was simply stared down.

The reporter remembers: 'Jana then said, "I'd like to thank Peter for assembling a terrific team and I'm sorry things had to go this way, but I'd like us all to get on with the job." Given what he had just said about her, it was the most dignified and tempered response. Peter is a lovely bloke, no one suggests otherwise; it's impossible not to like him and he did assemble a fantastic team, but he lost touch with the floor.'

Wendt says she has been unfairly painted. 'I am not, as has been suggested, trying to take a program into the orbit of the ABC,' she says. 'It is impossible to make an ABC program in prime time on commercial television. I am not foolish enough to seek to do that. But whatever led Peter to go in that direction I don't know. If it was pressure [from management to increase ratings], it was not pressure that he ever communicated to me . . . When I came to Seven I had a very clear brief, and in my mind it remains clear.'

The lack of communication is, according to Manning, mutual. 'Jana has never articulated in writing or speaking what exactly she means by quality current affairs,' Manning says. 'She has never actually defined it.'

Three weeks into the show, with relations between Wendt and Manning already in turmoil, things came to a head over the biggest news story of the year, the Port Arthur tragedy.

On Sunday, 28 April, the day of the massacre, Wendt and Manning had a telephone discussion about the next Tuesday's program. Manning, despite being, according to Wendt, well aware of the events unfolding in Hobart, wanted to lead the show with a story about a lobster-fishing community in Western Australia instead.

Wendt was amazed at this judgment, and told him so. 'Might that not provide us with a lead?' Wendt asked Manning. Wendt says Manning knew about the tragedy because he had told Wendt, resting after arriving back in Australia the day before, that the shocking event was happening. Manning then said, according to Wendt: 'It will be all over by Tuesday.' There ensued what Wendt now calls a 'rip-roaring screaming match'.

Manning denies it happened that way. 'That's absolutely wrong. Pre-Port Arthur I suggested to Jana we should try leading with a lighter item instead of a heavier one. We were trying different things to see what worked with the audience.'

Feelings weren't helped with a story *Witness* ran about near-death experiences. Perhaps shuddering at a familiar approach (her time at *A Current Affair* still sharp in her memory), Wendt was believed to be upset at the 'ultra-tabloid' nature of the piece. She is known to have thought the story 'a mess' and argued with Manning to have it removed. Manning got his way and the piece ran, confirming what Wendt believed was a downward spiral in the program's tone, and the 'woolly-headed' mix of stories it was presenting.

'But we have done some stories that I am enormously proud of, like Graham Davis's piece on paedophilia, like the piece we ran on Tjandamurra O'Shane's struggle, Paul Barry's story on the Russian elections, Graham's piece on black deaths in custody . . . I can go on and on . . . It was more our set of values which underpinned [the program] that was of concern for me, that we didn't give the proper priority to.'

Manning and Wendt continued to have heated 'debates'. Manning stuck to his view that the program he was producing was the program he wanted and the one that had been discussed. It was then that Wendt realised the two had parted company about where the show should go.

Seven Network managing director Gary Rice, who had been monitoring the tension, spoke to Manning and Wendt to try to sort it out. Manning now claims Wendt rang Rice in Atlanta during the Olympics and said to him: 'It's him or me.'

Wendt declined to comment on this issue, but staff at *Witness* say Wendt never put it that bluntly, and that she only wanted her concerns to be heard.

'That's how it was represented to me,' Manning says. 'This power play began very early in the program's history. The attitude of taking her bat and ball and going home and not talking began only three months after the program started.'

Manning described a period where relations had almost broken down between him and Wendt. 'For four months it was a legal minefield, her lawyers saying her contract wasn't being honoured. It was lawyers at 30 paces when the program was still a baby.'

Wendt agrees she asked her lawyers to examine her contract, but won't say any more. Asked whether she offered or threatened to resign, Wendt says: 'Suffice it to say that I said the situation was very difficult for me to work in, principally because I had actually been hired on the basis of doing a par-

ticular sort of show, and the show that was actually being produced was not the same show.'

It came down, in the end, to a power struggle in which Wendt prevailed. 'It was a power struggle as to who was going to run the show,' Manning says. 'Jana has had consultant rights in her contract, but virtually sought veto rights. My view was that the presenter should not be the executive producer of the same program. And I wasn't prepared to simply take instructions.'

Wendt says, 'I don't seek, and have never sought, to be executive producer of the program. I have no claims or aspirations to that job.'

Manning's detractors say he drifted from the original brief to do quality journalism. 'That's crap,' Manning says. 'There was a commitment to this being a quality program and we stuck by that all year.'

Why does Wendt believe otherwise? 'Because I don't think she got her way,' Manning says. 'She and Gareth Harvey are re-visiting *On Assignment*, which was taken off the air after one or two programs, meaning, I think, Jana's interest is in powerful people overseas and foreign reporting. My view was the program should be two-thirds Australian, and that there was a limit on the number of reports on Pakistan, Israel or Russia that we could sustain.'

Wendt responds, 'Both foreign and local stories have a part in current affairs. If someone comes to me with a first-class idea for an Australian story, I am very happy to do it. What reporter in their right mind wouldn't?'

Manning's comments – given that he still works for the network and she is its biggest star – are nothing short of extraordinary. But despite the bad feeling, he says he is proud of what the show achieved. 'We did what we set out to do – we did the difficult stories and we pitched ourselves between *Four*

*Corners* and *Sixty Minutes*. That's what we aimed to do and that's what we did.'

At the 'accusation' in a newspaper that she has been using her 'million-dollar star power to get her own way', Wendt says, 'My concerns . . . are editorial concerns. Now I am a very big girl, I am paid a very high salary to do a job and with my profile I suppose comes a certain . . . well, I am a public figure.

'I guess that is one of the reasons, if not the reason, that the network hired me to do this job . . . But honestly, I am not in the habit of throwing it around for the heck of it . . . It is a personal thing, it is not a thing to do with my status, it is to do with what I regard as my, hopefully, professional consistency.'

Wendt denies her vision of the show is too highbrow. 'You know, I am seen as the sort of person who wants to drive this thing as some unpalatable . . . some non-commercial thing. Well, rubbish. I, as a viewer, want to watch current affairs that is genuine and entertaining as well. I don't want to swallow too many bitter pills watching current affairs television.

'I don't want to sound as though I have a halo because I most certainly do not. I mean, I've worked at *A Current Affair* and *60 Minutes* for however many years, 15 or so, and you know I've been there through a fair number of stories that maybe I thought were not exactly the greatest stories on Earth. Some were terrific, some were not.'

Ratings for *Witness* were often solid but unspectacular, averaging more than one million viewers a week across five capital cities. Wendt, though, believes ratings were unsatisfactory and disappointing. Still, the network management has assured staff that *Witness* will return next year. And Wendt will be there. 'I think it is my duty in my position to try and deliver something that is honest, that is as untainted by gimmick as possible and that tells the truth . . .' she says.

*November 1996*

*Jana Wendt left* Witness *in spectacular style. She later joined SBS's* Dateline *as the program's host and then returned to the Nine Network, where she hosts the* Sunday *program.*

# John Cornell

It is late in the day and the sun is filtering through the Norfolk pines on the shoreline when the two women wander past John Cornell's Beach Hotel, playing their bongo drums. It is a quintessential Byron Bay moment. But perhaps not one you would expect Cornell, reclusive multi-millionaire, 1986 *BRW* Businessman of the Year, the sharpest deal-maker in Australian film history and the totem representative of moneyed Byron Bay, to notice.

Halfway through a sentence, he climbs out of his chair slowly – he hurt his back a few hours earlier – and moves to the window to try to find out where this excellent feral music is coming from. On his weather-beaten face, there is the look of intense peace and utter contentment that perhaps only a man with many millions of dollars, a perfect life and nothing

to prove to anyone can effect.

'There wouldn't be enough money in Scrooge McDuck's money bin to get me to go on the [Byron Bay] council,' he says. 'I believe in benevolent dictatorships. If you were running the whole joint yourself, I'd be in it, for a short period of time . . . I would be making Australia the greenest place on the planet. Things grown with as little assistance from chemicals as possible. I'd be feeding the rivers so they were alive with fish.

'Even when we started our tourist ads with Hoges, even then I thought, "If you could have a drink from the tap and if you could catch a fish in the river, you don't have to do much more." We don't have to have casinos and all this false stuff to attract people. Instead of knocking down the forest, take people for a walk through it. A Koori takes a tourist through the forest and tells them what it means to his tribe; economically, you're going to make much more of that piece of land than if you knock the trees down and turn them into woodchips or cardboard.'

This is the new life of John Cornell, and perhaps it's even a new man we're witnessing. Now, semi-retired and having divested himself of most other commitments, he is the baron of Byron Bay, more interested in the environment than films, more concerned with making sure his beloved Byron doesn't turn into the Gold Coast than with increasing his massive fortune.

And, poignantly, it was his life's greatest triumph, *Crocodile Dundee*, that changed his priorities, quelling his professional ambitions. 'I think I found they were partially quelled at least. I've always had it in my mind that around 50, I'd start having time to myself. I'm now 54 and in that position. I don't have my shingle hung out on the door for anybody or anything.

'[*Crocodile Dundee*] was like a big party. And you knew then

that you would never again have that same feeling in your life. It was like taking up mountain-climbing and having a lash at Everest first-up and finding yourself on top.'

Does he miss the movie deals? 'No,' Cornell says quietly. 'But I remember them with great fondness.'

John Cornell is an articulate man and skilled conversationalist who resorts to the profane without too much of a leap. Just once, memorably, he talks out of the side of his mouth, in a mock-conspiratorial tone, an echo of his former life-saving, cap-wearing character, Strop. He is the identikit casual Aussie larrikin, with strong family values, an iron-clad commitment of loyalty to his mates (he and Paul Hogan never signed an agreement in the 20 years they've been partners) and a slight embarrassment at the formality of being interviewed ('Gettin' serious, mate,' he warns at one point).

Cornell has never sought a big profile. He says he has only ever done a handful of interviews. 'If it was between me or Hoges, I'd interview Hoges,' Cornell says.

Reclusive? 'Yes, and it's going to get even more so.'

He wears brown cords and loafers. His leathery face is well worn, and his dazzling smile is the clearest reminder of the flaxen-haired Strop of the mid-'70s. He is still nursing a sore head from a rare big night on the sauce. 'My father, who's in his eighties, said to me the other day, "It's all downhill when you hit 50," and I think he might be right,' Cornell laughs.

We are talking in Cornell's new hotel adjacent to the pub he built 10 years ago. He has proudly pointed out the interior design by Delvene Delaney and the paintings in the rooms by her sister, Raylee Delaney ('Clever girls,' he says).

The hotel has been Cornell's major project for a year or so, and now it's up and running, he'll fade into the distance again.

Cornell used to wonder why his friend Kerry Packer kept working so relentlessly into middle age. Cornell vowed he would watch his children grow up, and spend as much time as possible with Delvene Delaney, whom he met 20 years ago and married in 1978. Basically, when you have a bank account roughly in the vicinity of John Cornell's, why work?

'I feel like I've got enough money. I was even saying this to my accountant the other day. I'm sort of not interested in deals like a normal guy with my resources would be. I sort of tend to put my money in something and leave it there.'

But Cornell's legacy will live on in the gum trees and scrub that spill down to the several beaches he has taken away from the possibility of development. Aside from his 61-hectare farm and his beachfront home, Cornell owns land at 1770, a small town on Queensland's central coast. 'It's beautiful. I tend to collect acreages that are beautiful and that I never want to sell or sub-divide. While I own them, they'll remain beautiful pieces of beach. Some people collect really nice paintings; I've collected four beachfront properties.'

The reason Cornell is able to indulge these passions is *Crocodile Dundee*, a film that grossed more than $300 million around the world, including $200 million in the US. He and Paul Hogan put up most of the $8.8 million it cost to make the film. 'I put in everything I had without selling my house,' Cornell says.

He then did the deal of the century. Spurning the usual 'pre-sale' of the film (which provides a guarantee to investors for a certain return but robs the producer of massive profits if the film flies), Cornell instead went for the 'blue sky' option, which meant Cornell and Hogan stood to clean up big time if *Crocodile Dundee* went well.

'We were on the streets of New York filming,' Cornell remembers, 'and this guy from Paramount Pictures came up

and said, "Which one's John Cornell?" and I said, "He's the short bloke with a raggedy sort of head." He came back, "Mr Cornell, Paramount Pictures would like to buy your movie." I said, "We haven't finished it yet." He said, "We still want to buy it." ' He has opened a cold beer now, and is, understandably, relishing telling how he took on the world and won. 'The best word I ever said was no.' Bucking the established system further, Cornell 'tested' the movie with audiences himself, rather than letting the studio do it. 'I was told, "It got an 82." I said, "What does that mean?" and he said, "*Butch Cassidy* got an 83" . . .'

*Crocodile Dundee* went on to be Australia's most successful film, the most successful foreign film in American history and made a big star of Paul Hogan around the world. 'If I had let them have the film,' Cornell now reveals, 'it would have meant $100 million difference.' He calls it 'the big collect'.

After their triumphant 1986, the world was at Cornell's and Hogan's feet. The inevitable *Crocodile Dundee 2* followed and did well, making $38 million. Hogan and Cornell were still hot.

And here's where the fairytale turned a little sour. When *Almost an Angel*, a fairly lacklustre story about Hogan as a former crim returning as an angel, took just $10 million in 1990, $2 million less than its production costs, Cornell and Hogan realised that nobody, not even the golden pair, was invincible.

Did he have doubts? 'You always have your doubts, and you should too. Because no one on the face of this planet can make a string of movies that are continually successful. Not even Spielberg.'

Was the magic ingredient missing from *Almost an Angel*? 'Yeah, I think that film was too laid-back, too slow-paced. It was intentionally old-fashioned. I put that one down to being a dart slightly off the board after a couple of bull's eyes.'

*Almost an Angel* in 1990 was the last movie Cornell had any involvement in. Hogan's next one, *Lightning Jack*, for which shares were floated last year on the Australian stock exchange, made a $15.4 million loss, and down the drain went Hogan's money as well as the contributions of thousands of Australian investors hoping for another *Croc* clean-up.

'I didn't particularly like the script or the premise of the film, so I had nothing to do with it,' Cornell says. 'But then, I had done three movies on the trot, and they eat you up.'

Cornell is pensive on the subject of his friend's career since the glory days. He realises it could have been done differently. 'What his career should have gone is *Croc 1*, *Croc 2*, then *Ghost*, when he was offered it . . . It was about the afterlife, and the script he had was a bit the same [as *Almost an Angel*], so he went his way.

'We had a relationship with Paramount Pictures. We had just delivered a film that brought in hundreds of millions of dollars. We had the choice. [Paul] said no before I'd read the script. When I read it, I rang him and said, "It's a good script, I like it," and he liked the script too.' Cornell shrugs. 'Should have done it. Three in a row it would have been.'

Did Hogan take just an acting role in *Flipper*, now being shot in the Bahamas, because the pressure of producing was too much? 'An actor has to act to stay competent at his craft. He's had lots of roles offered that neither of us liked. I didn't even read the script of *Flipper* but he felt like doing it.'

After 20 years of managing Hogan, Cornell opted out of doing the job full-time. 'It would have meant I'd have to have lived over there to do it properly, and that wasn't my cup of tea.' Cornell handles Australian offers.

It is on the subject of the media chainsaws that took to the Hogan poppy when Hogan left his wife of 30 years, Noeline, that Cornell articulates some rare bitterness. 'Accuracy is the

thing that eludes journalism the most. I've been on both sides, and I've seen total fabrication. Total fabrication, like Paul Hogan was interviewed by police after a fight in a restaurant involving he and his new girlfriend Linda Kozlowski; partner John Cornell and his wife, Delvene Delaney, were present, profanities were used, fellow diners were upset, people left the restaurant" . . .' A quick pause. 'We were 400 miles away.

'Paul Hogan is the last man you would ever meet who would start a row in a restaurant. The man's got class. And [for the media] to take away that class I think is a part of the reason for my increased suspicion. I don't want to know about that side of matters.

'In that case the error was compounded, as it can be these days . . . Channel Nine and Seven both repeated the allegation, saying *The Sun* newspaper [a British tabloid] said today . . .'

The media and some fans turned against Hogan when he split with Noeline. 'Those who thought perhaps it was rotten to leave your wife, he might have lost them,' Cornell says. 'Anyway, you don't know the circumstances of how men's lives go. As far as I was concerned, he'd decided to leave his wife. It had nothing to do with me.'

Hogan became a symbol of middle-aged men leaving their wives for younger women. 'Yeah. He did. But it was all very unfortunate, because Paul was one of the most level guys that you ever ran into. He never took advantage of his showbusiness popularity to chase sorts, or anything like that. He was just as happy having a cheeseburger and watching *The Don Lane Show*.'

Cornell doesn't mind admitting he has enjoyed the golden life. He was born in Kalgoorlie in Western Australia, the son of a bookie, and grew up in Bunbury. 'It was a wonderful

upbringing, and it's probably that upbringing that's brought me back to Byron Bay. It was a small country town, on the sea, with a river where you could swim, fish, do all those delicious things.'

After giving up his pharmacy studies, he landed a job on Perth's *Daily News* on the same day as Mike Willesee, and took just four years to leap from cadet to A-grade ('The quickest anyone had done it over there'). Soon he found himself as the Melbourne producer of *A Current Affair*, working with Willesee. He thrived on the excitement of TV.

And then, prophetically, he saw Paul Hogan on *New Faces*, signed him for appearances on *A Current Affair* and forged one of Australia's most famous and enduring friendships and business partnerships. Almost spontaneously, Cornell even joined Hoges on screen, creating Strop, a moronic, virginal character whose popularity far exceeded his exposure.

'I can't believe [Strop's popularity] with so few appearances,' Cornell remembers. 'They thought he was real and [were] sort of disappointed to find out he was John Cornell who managed Hoges. They wanted the dill, the virgin. Strop had a good heart. I saw him again for the first time in a long time recently . . . I wouldn't have seen him for 12 years or something, but we've put together a video of the Hogan shows because we kept getting calls from people wondering where they could get a copy. They would say, "I want to show my kid what used to make me laugh." The hangover cure sketch did make me laugh again.'

With Cornell's business savvy and natural instinct for knowing a good thing when he saw it, and Hogan's irresistible, laconic charm, everything the pair touched turned to gold. *The Paul Hogan Show* is still remembered as often-hilarious television.

The ads for Australia the pair pitched to the Federal

Government boosted tourist numbers and gave Hogan a high US profile, which was useful when it came to doing interviews for *Crocodile Dundee*.

The only stain on the canvas is the successful 'Anyhow' campaign Hogan did for Winfield cigarettes, which proved lucrative for Hogan, Cornell and Winfield.

'For both Paul and I, that's the sole dismay of our professional lives,' Cornell admits. 'When we were selling cigarettes, none of the evidence was out about how bad they were and how addictive they might be. When you find that out . . . My advice to kids is "Don't smoke", it's a dopey one.'

The two larrikins blustered on, Hogan a family man, Cornell at the other end of two marriages. It was Hogan who helped instigate Cornell's third. 'He said to me, "Mate, you should meet this sort, Delvene Delaney, she'd be perfect for our shows",' Cornell remembers. 'Subsequent to that, I saw her at a restaurant, the Fiveways, in Paddington, in Sydney, and the guy she was with went to the toilet, so I whipped across then and introduced myself. We've put in nearly 20 years together. I'd had a couple of marriages under my belt by that point, so something's worked.'

His first daughter, Melissa, is now 26, and leaving Byron Bay to study acting in London. His second, Allira, is 16 and Liana is six. 'A decade between each one. I go off every decade, apparently.'

What sort of dad has he been? 'Non-strict, bending, loving, non-pushy, try to get your kids' confidence, let them know that you love them, all the simple, old-fashioned things . . .'

The golden life at Byron continues. 'When we came up here, my wife was a television star, on television five nights a week [*Sale of the Century*], which was massive exposure. Back in the

days when she was in her mid-twenties, you couldn't go to the beach without gathering a crowd. That drove us out. Also the demands of a social life. We got invited to so many things, openings, first nights, that you were constantly on the booze. I like a drink, but I've got to have space in between.'

Cornell is so protective that last year he forked out $7500, what the local football club would have made out of a New Year's Eve concert, so the already-full town would not be subjected to potential violence. 'Worth every cent,' he says. He enjoys Byron's diversity, including the '90s version of the hippies, the ferals. 'It takes all blends of people.'

Byron Bay, he says, is at the most important stage of its existence. Other towns along the coast should be developed, rather than choking Byron with more infrastructure. 'Clint Eastwood went through much the same sort of feelings that some of us are having with Byron Bay when he had to become mayor of Carmel and change the structure of the council, otherwise the whole joint was going to go under.

'I believe in population controls in small country centres . . . Noosa's stuffed now. It used to be Melbourne's favourite place. You are now going to a beach suburb. And that could happen here.'

Cornell is onto his favourite subject. 'The Clarence River is the third-biggest river in Australia, a breeding ground for prawns like you wouldn't believe. When the breeding season begins and the little prawns are born, they open it up and you get about 28 boats stretched across the lake and they catch these [undersized] prawns and sell them for cat food because they're too small.'

Another day in Byron Bay is coming to an end. The sun is now sinking behind the pines and the drinkers in Cornell's Beach Hotel next door are sinking deeper into their redwood chairs. Cornell is heading to London the next day to organise

drama schooling for his daughter. He takes an urgent call from Jamie Packer, who invites the Cornells to join them on the Packer yacht in the Mediterranean. Of course.

It was young Packer's father, Kerry, who, with their joint World Series Cricket enterprise in the late '70s, taught Cornell a lot about business. 'If you were dealing with Hollywood studios and you had cut your teeth on Kerry Packer, there was no one who was going to be any sharper or more intimidating. So that was handy at a young age.'

Delvene Delaney passes by the door a couple of times and both times Cornell flashes her a quick smile. Now, he joins Delaney in the corridor and they share a tender kiss. Cornell has called his marriage the great triumph of his life. Why is it so strong? 'Because we're mates,' he says, 'with all the things that that means.'

Cornell is still nursing his back, but also recovering from his first extensive interview in six years. He admires the new swimming pool. 'There is always happiness around water,' he says. 'Always laughter, you know, kids splashing around.'

The look of contentment reappears. And frankly, why wouldn't it? The biggest corporate feral in town shuffles off for a beer with some mates next door.

*September 1995*

*After this, John Cornell moved to the UK for four years before returning to Byron Bay, from where he runs his various business interests. He maintains his low profile.*

# Jane Phelan

It's 10 years since we'd seen Jane Phelan on television, but the person who walked into the cafe in Moonee Ponds still looked familiar. Moments remembered: there she was, interviewing Imelda Marcos on *A Current Affair*, or standing outside the red carpet for the 1989 Academy Awards ceremony, or reporting from Canberra, or being photographed with a group of other journalists alongside a smiling Frank Sinatra at Sanctuary Cove.

Jane Phelan was a rising and versatile star, who was working as a reporter alongside Laurie Oakes in Canberra, a producer on Steve Vizard's *Tonight Live* and a reporter and executive producer on *The 7.30 Report*. The girl from St Columba's College in Essendon who had always dreamed of becoming a journalist had come a long way. And her mother, Shirley, had

the scrapbook to prove it.

And then she disappeared from the screen, and from journalism, and only now does she feel comfortable talking about why. Jane walks in with the help of a stick. She doesn't need it all the time, but without it she sometimes favours her right side too much. She does not have the use of her right hand, but has learned to cut food, write, cook, sometimes drive a car and generally get by with the left. It is all part of learning how to live again after suffering a stroke a decade ago.

The night it happened, doctors told her mother if she made it through the first night she would have permanent brain damage. 'A vegetable,' her mother said when the doctors were finished talking. It's a brutal word to use about a person, but it is used innocently and often by relatives in shock themselves. There isn't time in those first few fraught hours to find the correct language for something disastrous that's just happened to your daughter.

For Jane, it was the end of one type of life and the beginning of another quite different one. She started again. After years of anger and depression, she was forced to re-learn how to walk and talk. She had to get to know the new person she'd become. She'd have to do a lot of things, and her mother and four sisters, whose lives were re-shaped by the stroke, made sure she did.

In the darkest early days, Jane wasn't sure what life held for her. Now, a decade on, she does know. She speaks well, between hesitations in trying to summon forgotten words. She has decided to tell her story for the first time, and she does it eloquently, even if one has to resist the temptation to be helpful, to finish sentences for her, which so infuriated her when her family would sometimes do it in the early stages of her recovery.

That she is sitting here this morning as an advocate for

stroke sufferers is a remarkable triumph. Her story of rebuilding her life is one of persistence and the love of a family that refused to let her go.

In the summer of 1993 everything in Jane Phelan's life was working out as planned. She had just finished a successful six years with Channel Nine, including two as a reporter on *A Current Affair*, two in Canberra and a year in the Los Angeles bureau. In 1983 she won an award for her coverage of the Ash Wednesday bushfires. In 1988 she showed her versatility by sitting in for Graham Kennedy on his late-night news program *Coast to Coast*.

In the mid-'80s she had been a young reporter in Canberra in the early days of the Hawke Government. Nick McCallum was 'the third-string reporter' for Channel Ten and Jane was his opposite number at Nine. As juniors, they had to wait on the steps of the old Parliament House in the frigid Canberra early morning for then Treasurer Paul Keating to arrive. 'Morning, children,' he would greet them. Asked a question, he replied, 'I'm not going to discuss the economic policy of this country on the footpath with children.'

Jane found this condescending but amusing. 'She was very driven, very ambitious and very determined, but there was also a wicked humour,' McCallum says. 'Jane would always see the funny side.'

But she took her work very seriously. The bass-voiced Canberra veteran Peter Harvey said, 'She was one of the most hard-working, full-on, vibrant human beings I'd ever worked with. We were working like a sausage machine, churning it out from 5 a.m. to midnight, as you do up there. But the going was never too tough for Jane.'

Her bosses at Nine had big plans for her: the New York

bureau. But one day Jane received a call from an old friend from university days, Steve Vizard, wondering whether she'd be interested in producing his new late-night show. She agreed. As producer, she arranged interviews with people like Bob Hope, Shirley MacLaine and Mel Gibson, and co-ordinated the news to be read by Jennifer Keyte, with whom Jane had gone to school. 'She was dedicated, focused and hard-working,' Vizard says now. 'Trusting someone's judgment when putting on a live show is everything, and I trusted her implicitly.'

In 1991 Jane decided to move to the ABC to work on *The 7.30 Report*. Her big scoop was getting former Victorian Premier John Cain to give her his first TV interview since leaving office. On several occasions she was reporter, executive producer, associate producer and, when Mary Delahunty was away, presenter as well.

She was 35 and nothing seemed impossible. She was paying off the mortgage on an apartment in Windsor, she looked forward to summer holidays at the house her mother, Shirley, rented at Ocean Grove and she savoured long hours reading books on weekends. She loved her work and she was in a happy relationship with another ABC journalist. Her big ambition was to work overseas again as a reporter, or join the ABC's flagship current affairs show, *Four Corners*.

But tonight all that could wait. Shirley Phelan had decided to shout Jane and her four sisters and two of their husbands to see one of her favourite singers, Elton John, so 17 February became a big, happy family occasion. It was hot that night and the Yarra was mirror-like, cyclists flashed by on the bank and there was a buzz in the crowd as they made their way in to where the 'Rocket Man' would start playing in half an hour.

When Jane arrived outside the Tennis Centre she felt some stabbing pains in her head. Migraine, she thought. After all,

she'd had them before. Believing that level of pain couldn't last, she walked down to the river and up and down the cycle track to see if the night air might help. After 45 minutes the pain seemed to ease. She went in and found her family. Elton John was singing 'Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me'. And that was the last thing she remembered.

After collapsing, Jane was taken by ambulance to St Vincent's Hospital. She had had a massive cerebral haemorrhage, becoming one of the 40,000 Australians affected by stroke each year regardless of age or gender. Stroke is Australia's third-biggest killer, but Jane had been spared.

Her family stood around her bed, shocked and devastated, having no idea what their sister and daughter would be like when she woke up. Her four sisters, Belinda, Lisa, Andrea and Cathy, took it in turns to be at her bedside. One morning, after nine days in a coma, Jane opened her eyes and saw Lisa. Jane sat bolt upright, Lisa remembers now, and pointed towards the door – 'Lee, I just want to get out of here' – and then drifted off to sleep. 'I told the speech therapist what she'd said and she looked at me as though I were in denial,' Lisa says now.

It was an extraordinary thing to witness. After all, Jane had emerged from the coma without the ability to talk or walk. There was no movement in her right arm. She was aphasic, which meant she had lost language and speech, and suffered hemiplegia, which meant loss of movement to the right side of the body. She wouldn't say another complete sentence for months.

But amid the devastation was some good news: her brain had not been damaged as profoundly as the doctors had feared. Jane remembers her family standing around her bed. They were putting on smiling faces, only crying when safely out of the room. Jane remembers trying to talk but no

words were formed. She was confused and terrified. What she wanted to say was, 'What has happened to me? What will happen to me?'

It was the beginning of a gruelling journey for Jane and her family. All of their lives were changed forever that February night. Jane's second-youngest sister, Andrea, would bring her three-month-old son, David, to St Vincent's and then the rehabilitation hospital in Kew to see Jane. 'I'm sure she had millions of other things to do,' Jane says now. But Andrea could see the effect her little baby was having. 'Having a baby around brought a little bit of joy to a very sad time,' Andrea says. 'Jane couldn't speak but when David was there she moved around a bit and I think it was because he was there.'

'Our lives were devoted to Jane,' Lisa says now. 'It was work and helping Jane recover.'

But in those terrible early days the family could not know what they faced. The first step was a visit to a speech therapist. 'Jane,' the therapist said, 'I want you to tell me what is on this card.' It was a brown cow. 'I knew it was,' she says now, 'but I couldn't get the word "cow" out. Mum and Lisa and me were shocked at how massive the stroke had been. If you can't get a cow right . . .'

It was suggested that she go and live at a rehabilitation hospital in Kew. She was confined to a wheelchair, couldn't talk and her carers felt it would provide the support she needed. She spent eight months there and hated it. 'I was devastated,' Jane says. 'The only part that made it worthwhile was that at the end of the first month I could say the words "yes" and "no".'

The grind of learning to speak again was agonising. She persevered. The next few words she learned were 'cake' and 'milk' but sometimes she got confused as to which was which. Then she slowly managed some short phrases. 'Nice day' was

the first. 'The only thing was I was using it in the middle of a cold Melbourne winter,' she says now.

Then she learned 'How are you?'

'I was scared to use that because I thought I might break down. You cry at the drop of a hat. I'd have to be in the right frame of mind to ask that question.'

She lost her boyfriend. 'We remained friends but it was quite obvious that he was a go-get-em journo and it just wouldn't work. It cost me in that way.'

After eight months Jane decided she couldn't stand living in a hospital any more so moved back home. Lisa, a primary school teacher, made it her job to teach her sister to read. She brought over to Shirley's house books she used for prep level and they started at the beginning. 'It was so shattering,' Jane remembers. 'Being a journalist I had a great flair with pen and paper but now I couldn't spell.'

With her right hand not functioning, she took three months learning how to write with her left. 'There was a time when I was sending people cards because everyone had been so wonderful to me. I would write "Dear John," and a little bit of a blurb. "Love Jane". Only they couldn't understand it. So my sisters would help me put it back into English. It was like living in a foreign country but I was the only one who had to learn the language.'

For Shirley Phelan it wasn't the first personal tragedy she had to endure. Her husband of 33 years, Ken, an orthodontist, died from lung cancer in 1987. Ken was a big, colourful man, the life of the party, who enjoyed a punt and adored his family. 'He was always there,' says Jane. Shirley had nursed him at home for two-and-a-half years.

At Shirley's house, Jane was at a low ebb. She felt as though fate had singled her out for this cruel treatment. She sometimes wondered what the point was in getting out of bed in

the morning. 'It was a cross between anger and depression,' she says now. 'It was just terrible to me that everything I had was now lost. I realised that journalism was now a closed door and that was shattering. That was all I'd ever wanted to be.'

Jane retreated into herself. She would sometimes lash out at her mother's attempts to encourage her. At times there was tension between them. 'Come on, Jane, you've got to get going,' Shirley would tell her daughter. Jane would shrug. 'I'm fine, leave me alone.' But Shirley kept encouraging her daughter, pushing her to try.

One day Jane saw an ad for a bed whose angle could be adjusted with a remote control and was keen to buy it, but Shirley warned she might lose her movement. Jane, she feared, was starting to give up the fight. 'I would say, "This is terrible, you are not getting anywhere,"' says Shirley. 'She was so angry with the whole world.'

In 1999, Jane met Jane Hepenstall, a speech pathologist, at Melbourne Extended Care and Rehabilitation Service (MECRS) in Parkville. 'She was fairly unhappy with her life,' Hepenstall says, 'and trying to recover a lost self where that self was irretrievably gone.'

Anger dominates the early stages for a stroke sufferer. 'It's the fury of "Why me?" particularly among the young,' says Hepenstall. 'You are reduced to someone who can't sort out a yes from a no, people are misinterpreting you. It is utterly demoralising, I imagine.'

Six years after the stroke, Jane still felt a mix of anger and depression. And it was hard to break through with walking and speech if you had little motivation to progress. Jane was retreating, embarrassed to talk to friends, not going out, not being happy. 'She was experiencing social isolation, which can lead to a cycle of eroded self-confidence and a diminished sense of connection to other people,' says Hepenstall. 'Aphasia

creates significant personal loss. The act of enjoying a meal, sharing a joke, just everyday life activities become more difficult to be a part of.'

Jane's sisters, as they always did, rallied. They took her out – to cafes, to French restaurants, down to Lorne – to reacquaint her with the life she once had. Every week her eldest sister, Belinda, would take Jane out for a meal. Everyone was learning. 'No one can tell you how to go about helping someone rehabilitate,' says Lisa. 'It's trial and error.'

Jane went to stay at Lisa's house and wanted to bring her wheelchair, which would have made it difficult to negotiate stairs. 'I said, "Well, you can sleep downstairs then," ' Lisa remembers. 'The wheelchair stayed out of the house.'

At the family's traditional Sunday lunch, the conversation would always flow and Jane struggled to keep up. 'I'd always been the first to start a conversation. Now I started talking and they'd all jump in. They hadn't realised I was trying to join the conversation. Mum had to tell them, "She has a point of view and you've got to let her have her say."

'The next Sunday I sat down and someone raised a topic and they all turned to me. I didn't happen to have any strong views on that topic so I didn't speak. They were just being wonderfully supportive.'

One day Jane told her mother she thought she would improve if she got a place of her own. 'I was expecting a bit of a barney, but she said, "That's wonderful, darling." I couldn't believe it.' Shirley told her, 'You can have a life.'

Jane sold her Windsor flat and bought a one-bedroom unit two minutes' drive from her mother. 'I was pretty upset when she moved,' says Shirley. 'I thought, "How is she going to cope?" '

There was still a long way to go. Her speech was improving. She had learned to walk with a stick. Her confidence was

re-emerging. In 1997, she flew to Perth and then to Port Hedland, 1600 kilometres north, to visit friends and to take an 18-year-old friend for a series of driving lessons. She then accompanied him when he took his driving test. Soon afterwards, Jane decided to drive Lisa to Mount Macedon for a short holiday. 'I thought the worst that can happen was that I would take over the driving,' Lisa remembers. 'We didn't tell Mum. We thought she'd have a coronary.'

Jane was slowly emerging out of herself. Or maybe it was a new Jane, one who had learned to live with aphasia. In what Jane now says was a breakthrough moment, she decided last year to drive to Adelaide with three people from her weekly support group to attend a conference on aphasia. Apart from the fun of an old-style road trip and the benefit of sharing stories about living life with communication difficulties, it was also critical because it reignited Jane's skills at organising and team leadership, the ones that used to have her organising a television newsroom with calm practicality.

'The bond between us was unbelievable,' Jane says of her road partners. 'We laughed about different things, about our strokes. The conference was good, but the real benefit was the experience of being with other people with speech and language problems. We'd sit down at the dinner table at night and it probably took twice as long to get it all out, but we did. You name it, we've been there.'

Former Liberal Health Minister Michael Wooldridge had known Jane since her health-reporter days when she would interview what he now calls this 'brash young medical stirrer' for Channel Nine news. 'She was a very fine TV journalist and a very fine person,' he says now.

In the years afterwards, Dr Wooldridge would sometimes ring Jane to see how she was going. In 1998, he made a call that was more formal. He felt Jane would be a good consumer

representative and had been waiting for the right board position to be available. He asked whether she would be interested in joining the board of the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care and the Professional Services Review, both national health advisory committees. It was the start of a career in consumer representation and community groups.

A year later, Hepenstall suggested Jane co-ordinate a weekly meeting at the Moonee Ponds library of people who were recovering from strokes. It was a chance to share experiences and strategies. Anxious at first, Jane quickly became a skilled facilitator. 'She emerged as a leader in that group,' says Hepenstall. 'You could see her pre-aphasia qualities starting to come through. The people in the group have an enormous sense of support from her.'

Jane now sits as a consumer representative on four boards dealing with health-care issues, two Canberra-based, two in Melbourne. She still coordinates the communications group every Tuesday morning. Her work involves reading many documents, flying around the country, writing reports. Her training in journalism has been useful.

Jane's small apartment has a journo's feel about it still: piles of video tapes, magazines, files on the kitchen table, lots of books. It's here that she reclaimed her life from the devastation of the stroke. And it's here that she now makes new plans for her new life: different plans.

She lives here with Henry, her dog, now nine. She indulges her long-held passion for reading and, although it takes a month to finish a book she would once have devoured in a couple of days, it's a gift that that pleasure hasn't been taken away from her. 'I love my life,' she says.

Hepenstall believes Jane's recovery is extraordinary. 'Six years after the stroke she wasn't someone who was living a

satisfying life and now she is. Somehow she's managed to find this new person, which is the one she's managed to become.'

*October 2003*

*Jane Phelan still coordinates a communication group every Tuesday morning for people who have had strokes. She is on the committee of the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care and the Professional Services Review. She is writing her autobiography.*

# Jason Donovan

'Come up,' says Jason Donovan through the buzzer. He calls hello and peers down the stairwell of his small Bondi flat as I wind my way up.

Lately, the media recluse has only been letting friends up. For 18 months, as the news angles mounted, the closest journalists got to Donovan was the cuttings file. Now, here he is, unshaven, smiling and telling me to make myself at home, which is fair advice, given that he says we've got all afternoon. And given, also, that there is a remarkable story to be told.

Or perhaps it's a story about being singularly unremarkable and the extraordinary things that can happen to an ordinary young man from Melbourne.

He takes me on a guided tour of the apartment. We stand on the back stoop and look out across the Bondi roofs and the

slightly crazy gardens in the area. He points out different flats. He winces a little when I mention the marble floor in his. He's not sure about it at all. But he likes the flat. He heard it was for sale from his next-door neighbour and snapped it up.

Donovan often sits on the cushions over by the window and watches the surfers on Australia's most famous beach, and the eccentrics in the area. 'The people you see,' he says. On the wall are a mother-and-child painting and three hats on hooks. Signs of wealth? Well, no.

It's an almost perfect bachelor pad. Unopened boxes in the kitchen. Bit messy. No tangible signs of food. He's not here much and is arranging to rent it out.

In the living room a red guitar leans against a wall; a packet of cigarettes and glass of water rest on the glass coffee table. Under the glass is a photo montage of Donovan's friends. There is only one of Donovan – a small shot of him in a war film, holding a rifle and wearing dungarees.

He's wearing dungarees today, and a grey T-shirt and bush boots, and eating Chinese fried rice out of a plastic container. 'You wanna beer?' He disappears next door for a minute, waltzes back, puts the beer down and lights a cigarette. 'I don't have a fridge.' Who needs a fridge when you've got everything else in life? When you're the highest earner in the history of London's West End? (He was pulling down a reported $60,000 a week plus 13 per cent of the box office during *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat.*) When you own properties in Richmond, Bondi, London? When you have sold almost 13 million records? When you have the world at your feet?

What Donovan does not have, and cannot buy, is credibility from the hip crowd. The women's and teen magazines love him, but the broadsheets have always sneered. It's his big battle. Whaddya have to do to get some respect? How many

box-office records do you have to break? Not everyone can be Michael Hutchence kick-boxing photographers or Johnny Depp trashing hotel rooms. Donovan works hard, is reliable, the ultimate pro, and is a nice guy. And what does he get from the media? One long raspberry.

During his time in Australia over the past few weeks, he has been swamped with requests from the women's magazines, but the memos have gathered dust beside his manager's phone. Not interested. Forget that glitzy love-life stuff. Jason's pain, Jason's agony. Once it served a purpose, but no more.

He doesn't want any more headlines: he just wants to get on with things and stop dragging round in his saddle the terrible weight of that nauseatingly wholesome image. For so long, cool adults have hated Jason. Self-conscious teenagers over 15 have hated Jason. Jason has hated Jason – or certainly the one that stares out from the teen mags.

'I get sick of looking at myself,' he says. 'I worked hard, basically. And now I've had an opportunity to maybe relive what my mates were doing when they were 17, which is going out and putting their feet up on their utes, you know. So I'm just going back a little bit.'

He lounges round on the couch. Loud music pumps in from next door. He says he eats at the cafes around Bondi because he doesn't cook here. He's recognised but not hassled. 'It's calmed down a lot in the past three or four years.'

But in England it's still a bear pit. Anything goes. It's scary what those tabloids will write. They just make things up, he says. Take him seriously? Forget it. The media in England have had a fairly predictably hypocritical love–hate relationship with Donovan. The tabloids loved the Jason–Kylie stuff. The classier papers, such as *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, loved sending them up. But he was such a slow-moving target that nobody was ever fooled.

Much of it was written in the warm arousal of jealousy. For the Fleet Street hacks, he was pretty easy to be jealous of. Donovan was too blond, too rich, too uncomplicated and he came from a place too sunny by half. The half-truths of *Neighbours*, with its tans and healthy bodies and anodyne, toothy, inane lack of complexity, were drooled over by 15 million people a day.

The fantasy was a narcotic to the wan English, and Donovan (and Kylie Minogue) became its unreal embodiment. And so Donovan became a golden colonial, and did the English press hate that. They gave him hell when he grew his five o'clock shadow and wore rough clothes and wasn't like Scott Robinson of *Neighbours* at all.

'What am I supposed to be? Be an absolute arsehole and sort of be difficult and be hard to work with and therefore be something a bit more mysterious and a bit more intriguing? That's not me . . .

'People change, and thank God they do, because wouldn't it be boring if we all stayed the same? It's natural for people to develop their own personality. Everyone has stages in their lives, and because you're a public figure that stage is always documented, so there's always a reference. The *Neighbours* thing is what holds it all together.'

This is the new, relaxed Donovan, 180 degrees from the prepackaged puppet that he is now slightly embarrassed about. Used to be that he would keep the press at bay. Now? 'The only thing I've got to do is go to the bank.' Photos? We're told he usually works with 'hot' studio photographers for the glossy style mags in London and has editorial control over the photos. Now? 'Pick the best one, whatever.'

He is now 26 and tired of being the control freak; tired of making sure the image is manicured, polished, uncontroversial; tired of being the kids' hero; tired of his goody-two-shoes

image; tired of being sent up in the press; tired of *Neighbours* being mentioned always, always, always; tired of the media not letting him grow up.

If he wanted a change of image, he certainly found an interesting way of getting it: collapsing in Johnny Depp's Viper Room, the Hollywood nightclub where the actor River Phoenix died. After the incident in January, he maintained his media silence. He had been so long trying to create a bit of mystery about him, something a little exotic and dangerous, and perhaps, finally, he had.

When he collapsed, the news flashed around Australia and Britain. And the details were chilling in their symbolism. What was it about the Viper Room? A coat had been thrown over his face so he wouldn't be recognised. He was rushed to Cedar's Sinai Medical Center where Phoenix was found dead on arrival in December 1993. It was the third time in a year that he had collapsed in a nightclub.

So what happened? 'It was a publicity stunt,' Donovan says coyly.

A long pause. A sheepish look. 'Look, I'm 26 and I'm just . . . you know, I'm sure many other people have passed out in various places and it just happened to be there and documented.'

But what actually happened? 'You just pass out. God, you know . . .' Not asthma? 'No.' Were you on a bender? 'I wouldn't say bender. I was enjoying myself.' Was he embarrassed by it? 'No, not really. Not at all. I think, God, sometimes you faint, you pass out. It can happen anywhere.'

Anywhere? How many 26-year-olds actually end up passing out in nightclubs? Didn't he see the irony of its happening in the Viper Room? 'The River Phoenix thing. Yeah, I suppose so. The classic thing about it was picking up the *Telegraph Mirror* here and seeing a picture of me on the front page with

my eyes sort of half hanging out. Talk about editorial control. They didn't choose a picture of me in the interview where I was normal and sitting there with my eyes open.'

He lights a Benson & Hedges. 'I'm a normal 26-year-old, I have a normal good time going out. If I happen to fall over or run into a bus or crash my car, then more attention is going to be laid upon me than someone else.'

It is 18 months since Donovan gave an interview. He had most of last year off. He came from a long stint with *Joseph*, sued *The Face* magazine (and won) for calling him gay, endured the pain of watching former lover Kylie Minogue fall for Michael Hutchence and later others, and then become the biggest star in Britain. He needed a rest. And reinvention.

'Since finishing *Joseph* in December '93, an 18-month stint, I sort of thought, "I've done too much and I've got to stop and get out there and do things other than just work." I'm learning guitar, writing songs. Each time I'd do *Joseph* at night, I'd come home and play guitar for hours, just by myself.

'A lot happened very early on in my life. I went straight from school, four years of *Neighbours*, it just sort of steamrolled. You get to a point at 25, 26, where suddenly everything doesn't just fall into place. I didn't have time to sit there and think or make a plan or say: "What do I want to do into my thirties? Will I do my acting or my singing or will I just go away and live quietly somewhere?" '

Living quietly somewhere won't be possible at his home in London where he reaffirmed his 'big game' status in 1992 by taking legal action against *The Face*, England's style sheet, which Donovan and all his friends read. It was a turning point for him. The magazine ran a computer-enhanced photo of Donovan wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase 'Queer as f—'. He sued, denying he was gay. He won and was awarded $450,000 in damages, which threatened to close

down the magazine. He turned down the damages and settled for his $200,000 in costs.

Turning down the damages did nothing to assuage the blood-hungry hip crowd, the ones he would have wanted to be friends with, who resented Donovan for daring to threaten their bible with extinction.

Retribution was swift. At a gay rally, T-shirts that read 'Call me straight and I'll sue' sold strongly. A writer for *Private Eye* called him 'the notorious heterosexual Jason Donovan'. *The Face* published a list of those who had contributed to a fund to rescue the magazine, all hipsters: singer Neneh Cherry, TV host Jonathan Ross, the acidic writer Julie Burchill. Donovan called it the worst year of his life.

'I just got a bit sick and tired of people taking the piss, really,' he says now. 'That was when I was doing *Joseph*, there was a lot of intensity, eight nights a week. I felt emotionally drained . . . Not saying that I hadn't been lucky in life. I've been very lucky, but if you don't sometimes say, "Hey, wait a second, you're wrong," you're going to be at the mercy of other people's ideas or opinions or speculation.'

He does not regret suing. 'I was disappointed at the way the tabloids brought it out to be an anti-homosexual statement, which was not the issue at all. It was a little hard to take for a while, I felt here was I standing up for something I believed was right. And it was right.'

Jason Donovan was born on 1 June 1968 at Francis Xavier Cabrini Hospital, Malvern. He went to school around the corner at De La Salle College. His father, Terence, is a television actor who starred in *Division 4* and *Cop Shop* and now, ironically, *Neighbours*, the show he dissuaded his son from joining until he had completed his Higher School Certificate.

His mother, Sue McIntosh, was a presenter of children's television and had once been one of Benny Hill's 'Angels'. (She now reads the weekend news on ABC-TV.) Terence and Sue split up when Jason was four, and he was raised by his father, with help from Jason's maternal grandmother. From an early age, Jason cooked and cleaned for himself and learned to be independent. It toughened him up.

Life at home was 'like a boarding school without being away from home having to make your own decisions'. Terence's second wife, Marlene, was a fond figure. Jason, not academically inclined, retreated to his study, worked harder and attained an average HSC.

It was fun having an actor for a father. 'I remember as a kid walking down the street with Dad, and I would watch people behind me turn and look at him and pat their friend and Dad would keep walking, but I'd always turn around and be quite inquisitive about it. In the schoolground, if he came to drop me off at school he sometimes came to school with this *Cop Shop* gun and the kids loved it. I wasn't throwing it around, but I did like the fact that my dad was an undercover cop with a gun welded to his chest.'

Terence Donovan was not a pushy parent, and warned his son that acting was an insecure profession. 'I remember I did for English in Year 12 an oral piece from *Equus*. I'd learnt the whole thing and got up and recited it in front of the class and I suddenly went: "This is f— fantastic!" and the teacher said it was great. I learnt that from my dad walking around the house or sitting in bed at night learning scripts or reading lines with him.'

After years of minimal contact, when Jason was 21, he and his mother came together again and have been close ever since. 'I wasn't miserable, maybe disappointed,' he said in 1991. '[Not having contact with her] was a pain in the back of my

head. And I know that burying things like that can make you ill.

'Mum and Dad split when I was quite young, so I never really knew anything different, other than being with my dad,' he says now. 'I wasn't yearning for a mother figure per se, I just wanted to get in contact with her and say, "OK, I don't know what's happened between you guys and I don't care, you are my blood and let's go on." There's no resentment. I'm sure my mother's got her opinions about the time I didn't see her so much. I'd see her at Christmas and bits and pieces and I'm sure my dad hasn't told me about a few things, but I don't really want to know. I'm just trying to get on. I'm a different person and I care about those two people a lot.'

Donovan was in Melbourne when his grandmother died several weeks ago, aged 75, of cancer. 'It was a pretty weird thing to deal with. She always kept in touch with me. She was a really good-hearted, down-to-earth Frankston person. She gave me good insight into life. I used to catch the train down to Frankston to see her.

'It made me think a lot about death. I'm not being morbid here, but there's something peaceful about it, something cleansing, something resolving about it, being with that person as they go through it, and the few last words they say to you. It's a turning point in your life.'

When he joined *Neighbours*, his life was transformed, not least because he met Kylie Minogue, who was to be bracketed with Donovan for years to come. The great Australian romance had started. After they broke up, he was reported once as saying Minogue had broken his heart.

'No, that's not really true. It was a very intense relationship for four years. There was a lot of intrusion into our lives. Our

careers were both moving at the same time. We were both very independent socially and financially. That starts to bring in its own pressures, you know, travelling and moving in different directions. While one person's going up, the other one is there. It's a constant struggle. It was [definitely] love, but as to how far it was going to go . . .

'It was a pretty weird thing to come out of a relationship as strong as that and you suddenly have to take the back seat and just watch people talk about it. There's a rebirth in that. It flushes you out. If that relationship had continued, I don't think it would necessarily have worked. It was a decision, albeit not necessarily mine at the time, that was right. It was a good decision.'

Was the break-up hard? 'I was away overseas at the time and there wasn't a great support system around me. I don't want this to sound "Oh my God, this is the end of the earth," although probably at the time it did mean a hell of a lot to me.'

Was she the great love of your life? 'No. No. She stayed here for three or four nights over Christmas, which was really good. It was the first opportunity to . . . come out and sit down and say, "Right, what the f—'s going on? How are you?" We're grown people and we really try . . . Like a sister. You ring up and say, "How's it going? Take care. I'm here, blah, blah . . . "'

Jason and Kylie were a prize media couple. They recorded a sweet, hokey duet together and went off into the Stock Aitken Waterman music factory.

The Svengali producers churned out the hits for Donovan. It cemented his image as the made-for-TV pop star. 'I'd come in there – they usually hadn't even written by the time I got there – they'd say: "Go away for a couple of hours," and they'd write the lyrics. Four or five hours, the whole thing, I swear to God.'

While Donovan went into theatre and manufactured pop songs, Minogue went in another direction, choosing hip producers and shedding her little-girl image. The 'Singing Budgie' of earlier days dated the cool Michael Hutchence and, in one of show business's most astonishing turnarounds, warbled her way onto the A-list. Minogue went sexy; Donovan remained nice.

It still rankles. There was competitive jealousy. Donovan admits he sometimes flinched when he saw his former girlfriend on the cover of a hip magazine. Is there competitiveness still? 'Oh yeah. But age is taking those things away a bit. Her transition from the teenager to the woman she is now has been a lot easier for her in some ways. She is a very talented person and she's taken a good course, but it's easier for a woman to become sexy and push the [acts out pushing breasts up] and flirt around a bit more. For a guy you've got to put lines on your face and that's how your maturity goes. There's been difficult times when I've felt "God, I wish I was doing that." Everybody's searching for Mr Cool, you know? It's like, I reckon Mr Cool just happens if you're you. And what is "cool", anyway? It's being yourself and finding what personality works with you.'

Donovan is preparing for a long stint in the musical *Billy Liar*. He has just finished a TV movie, *The Last Bullet*, for Channel Nine. Another movie, *Rough Diamonds*, has just been released in Britain.

The reaction? A savaging from the elite press, this time the highly regarded specialist film magazine *Sight & Sound*, which calls Donovan a 'faded starlet' and still won't forgive him for *The Face* incident: 'The man who almost bankrupted "The Face" for reporting rumours that he was gay is given ample opportunity to display his butch charms. Cruising about the sets in rugged plaid shirts and blond streaks, crooning

manfully with his characteristic weedy tenor, he looks unquestionably straight.'

We take a walk round Bondi. Donovan wears his straw hat. Just one person comments. 'Hey, Jase, been to the Easter Show?' We stop for a coffee with Jason's next-door neighbour from the flats. It's normal stuff. No undue attention. Just another Bondi dude with his diary and banking details, even if those details are substantially different from yours or mine.

*April 1995*

*In the 10 years since this interview, Jason Donovan has forged a strong acting career in Australia, most notably starring in the acclaimed ABC series* MDA. *He has two small children and lives in Melbourne.*

# Andrew Denton

'I turned into . . .' The muzak in Denton's local pub pipes on as he pauses to try to isolate what indeed he had turned into. 'I was not easy to work with those couple of years. I came into the industry with a strong picture of what I didn't want to be, and I felt I was turning into that, which is somebody who, for the first time in my career, was concerned about what people were saying about me and my work, stuff that in the past I cheerfully, really genuinely, laughed at and disregarded.'

The new, recently relaxed version of Andrew Denton is talking about his two years hosting his late-night program on the Seven Network, a burden that became so heavy that when he walked away from television at the end of 1995, he couldn't help breaking into a jog, then a sprint. Before the audience knew it, the little guy with the spectacles, the AK–47 delivery

and the Wiltshire Staysharp humour had disappeared. And hasn't been seen since.

'I was very short-tempered and turning into not a very nice person,' Denton says. 'I just thought, "Life's too short, I don't want to be this person." I had a falling out with some of the people I was close to, but I didn't find that out until after.'

Was there talking behind his back? 'Yeah. Now, look. There are any number of ways I can vindicate my behaviour as well, but I'm not going to. Speaking objectively, I was not easy to work with. I wasn't this constant raging beast. But I'd become very egocentric.'

Amanda Keller, who worked with Denton at Seven and now at Triple M in Sydney, says, 'He exploded defiantly onto the scene and people were saying, "Do any project you like," so he became his own boss and that makes it very easy to stop hearing other people and taking other opinions on board. He holds on to his ideas so strongly and that can piss people off.'

'This phase he went through', as Keller calls it, was at its nadir during a two-month period in the show's second year. 'There was a time when things got a bit tense,' she says. 'It was hard not to feel it in a small team. It wasn't directed at anyone, it was just a mood. But this phase is probably larger in his own mind than anyone else's.' Keller says the positive side of Denton's moods was 'you got amazing television'.

To be seduced by the same fame machine that drives *TV Week* would appear to be most un-Denton-like. 'Worn down rather than seduced,' Denton says. 'It's very tough to live in that gravity. It is a very particular, heavy gravity. When 90 per cent of the conversations you're in tend to be about yourself, well, it just becomes second nature. So even when it's not desirable, advisable or even asked for, that's how the conversation tends to go.'

The man who had become this inflated centre of attention is today as humble as can be. The other drinkers are studiously avoiding eye contact, although that might say more about this north shore pub than it does about Denton's presence.

It could be, too, that the white heat that shimmered off Denton when he was Mr Prime Time has cooled just a little.

Which is just how he wanted it. Denton is, with glacial pace and with his ego checked at the door, tip-toeing back into the world of commercial television for another stint at sleeping with the enemy. He has announced plans for an irregular series of one-on-one studio interviews, using what he sees as his strongest skill.

Flushed with the success of his high-rating interviews with Paul Keating and Kevin Costner, Denton is happy to shed every other aspect of television and pursue his ambition: to become Australia's answer to Melvyn Bragg, the heavyweight producer of the long-running profile series in the UK, *The Southbank Show*. 'I'd be quite happy if one day I ended up as Australia's equivalent, to be really honest,' he says.

But first the craft must begin to get some respect. 'I think the television interview is deeply devalued,' Denton says. 'It makes me laugh when I see the number of people who just because they've been on television in another capacity, they're thrown into an interview situation when they clearly can't do it. It is a real skill and I feel I'm learning it all the time.'

He has written a couple of letters to prospective subjects, but can't nominate the talent yet. The model, he says, is the Keating and Costner interviews, 'on a little platform, cheap as chips in terms of staging. The criteria was the people be genuinely interesting and exclusive. I learned from television that I really like interviewing. At the risk of sounding deeply up myself, I think I do interviews very well and in a way other people can't.'

The series will be as irregular as Denton wants them to be. He will gear up only when there's someone in town who takes his interest enough, even if that is three times a year. But before you scream, 'Perfect job', it needs to be seen in the context of another full-time gig on radio, and the expressed need to get as far away as possible from the pressure of a national show with your name on it.

Denton and the television industry appear to be playing nicely now, but it hasn't always been this way. His excoriations on the state of television are legend. 'I've always had a love–hate relationship with television and I'm back in love with it. It's an on–off relationship. When I'm on it, I turn it off; when I'm off it, I turn it on. It's hard not to be contemptuous of television, but I also love it. I'm a lifetime consumer. When it's great, it's fantastic.

'Television can be as excellent and compelling and heart-stirring as any other medium.'

But it can also be a tired, idea-free zone, a dumping ground of re-packaging, new polish on old boots. 'I think Channel Nine, in particular, have learned this . . . Television executives have actually now got confidence that they can serve up anything and it will be watched – *Best of the World's Worst Drivers 4*, *Best of Red Faces 5* repeat. There are many of them out there, and even the repeats rate through the roof.

'They've discovered that television really is a licence to print money. They've realised they can make the same money or more by doing a lot less.'

The scars of having his own show have clearly not yet healed. How can something that looked like such fun to make and brought light-hearted comedy to an audience getting ready for bed represent one man's idea of hell on earth?

'I really had had enough of being on television,' Denton says. 'The thought of it nauseated me. I just couldn't stand

it anymore. I did feel burnt out. I reached a point, which disturbed me, where for the comedy-writing aspect, the structured comedy bits of the show, I was relying much more on the work of others than my own input and I didn't like that. I was actually relying on them. I was having trouble coming up with the ideas.'

He was also weary of this curious double life that famous people find themselves leading. 'I was tired of being that public person. I didn't want to be involved in that public dialogue anymore. I just wanted to go away and be quiet and not have to think of things, churn out ideas, have an attitude, be caught in the pop culture wheel. I was not enjoying my life. Even though I thought the work was really good, I was getting no pleasure from it.'

Denton says it takes three years for a show to find a solid audience. 'In your first year, if you're doing something new, people tend to really dismiss it and you get a lot of criticism. The second year you start to get kudos. And as far as I can tell, by the third year you're warmly embraced by the family.'

But that never happened because Denton's nausea set in. Seven, he says, 'had nothing to do with' this feeling. 'In the end I walked,' he says of his departure. 'The truth is I was told by Seven towards the end of that second year they didn't want to continue with the show. This, despite the fact that towards the end of its run – and it had a pretty rocky road in terms of where it was and its [program] lead-ins – it actually was winning the ratings.

'Then, at the 11th hour, I was asked whether I did want to do it again, but I'd actually long since made up my mind that I wanted to get out. I'd been doing it for eight years. I'd done 200-and-something shows, I got to do a broader range of work than any of my contemporaries. I was very lucky. I got

to do documentaries and political series and sport and sheer stupidity and a live chat show. I'd really had a great time with it.

'I'd got through eight years calling the creative shots the whole time. I'd never been told to do anything. I thought, "Gee, I've really got out ahead here." I'd never done anything of which I felt ashamed. I think the show on Seven was the best live television I probably ever will make.'

But the 'traitor' tag that often accompanies a performer leaving the ABC for the commercials and all that glorious money was as inevitable as daybreak. 'Long before I left the ABC, I said if I were to go and do exactly the same show word for word on a commercial channel, I'd get criticism for having sold out. And sure enough that happened.

'In this very street here, at Christmas, it was the only time I've ever got angry with someone who's come up and spoken to me. This guy said, "Geez, you were much better on the ABC." It was the end of a very hard year, my first year there, and I said, "You know, I worked all f— year to make the show and I just don't need to hear that right now." He was very taken aback and said, "Actually, I haven't seen the show," which just made it worse.

'At the risk of sounding immodest, if you want to look at the track record, it's an enormous amount of work, more than anyone else over that period of television. Remember, I started doing comedy when *The Comedy Company* started. As far as I know I'm the only "solo" performer who went all the way through. I felt I'd earned the right to have a break.'

Denton spent a year with his son, Connor, now two-and-a-half, and his wife, Jennifer Byrne, the journalist and former publishing director of Reed Books. He fielded (and declined) offers from all networks except Ten. 'Life is too short to end up twisted up and I felt twisted up,' he says now. 'So I took a

year thinking about things and just getting back to spending some time with my friends and reading books.'

He felt the need to apologise to friends he'd disenfranchised over this dark period. 'I kind of said, "Look, I'm sorry I've been . . . I really appreciate your forbearance."

'I was just quiet in my own head, not feeling the need to be what I sometimes felt, which was a performing monkey.'

Relations with friends patched up and, feeling as healed as someone who worries as much as Denton can be, he felt positive enough to accept a job on Sydney morning radio.

'It's so easy once you reach a certain point in television, just do the game-show thing. God knows, all that stuff is on offer and you can take the money and run. There were offers from all over the place.'

Denton recently made his return to television via *Club Buggery* with Roy Slaven and H G Nelson, a show he admires, and which is increasingly becoming the stars' forum of choice when they want to talk (Jana Wendt appeared when no one else could convince her). During the interview, Denton let fly about one of his favourite whipping boys: the Logies. He said, 'I've never met anyone in television who privately doesn't say that the Logies are crap. And all I do is say it publicly.'

He then went on to address the seduction of Andrew Denton after Roy Slaven's comment that 'television turns people into —holes'. 'Yeah, I think it does,' Denton agreed. 'I freely say that I turned into a television —hole, absolutely. Because what happens is you have a publicity department, your picture's on the cover of *TV Week* – mine never made it, and that made me bitter [laughs].

'Television fame is different from radio fame or theatre fame. When you are on television, people think you are, literally, larger than life. It's very hard not to become petulant and develop a big ego . . .'

Today, he sighs at his anti-Logies rantings. 'I've got to say I'm still a bit of an angry ant and I think it's about time I shook some of that off. I've probably had my last little rage against the Logies. I feel like, "All right, I'll be the boy that points at the emperor's new clothes, I'll be the one." But I realise that it's tilting at windmills and a windmill I happen to be in, which is even more stupid.'

Denton appears to have almost stopped beating himself up. Almost. This need Denton feels to Logie-bash – perhaps tantamount to shooting a very large fish in a very small bucket – is a surprising catalyst for self-analysis. The Logies being hilariously bad is one of the great staples of Australian television. It's interesting it upsets someone who sees himself so far above it.

'There's something about being in a small industry in a small country,' Denton says. 'It makes you small. And I realised that some of my attitudes and reflexes are quite small. I don't recant from them, because that's what I feel, but there are bigger things in life. I guess I think it's time to mature.'

There are, indeed, bigger things in life. The death of his father, the writer and broadcaster Kit Denton, of pneumonia, aged 68, was a difficult but 'life-affirming experience' for Andrew Denton. Kit Denton, much adored by his wife and three children, wrote *The Breaker*, which served as the basis for the film *Breaker Morant*.

Andrew Denton gave a deeply moving eulogy to his father. He quoted a piece of verse written by Kit when the three Denton children were quite young. In it, he describes 'two tomboy girls and a small, gentle boy/I must prepare them carefully and slow/So that it's no surprise to them to know/They wait, as all of us wait, to die/In the meantime, if I can make them laugh/The awkwardness of waiting's cut by half.'

'I was, and am, astonished by the letters and cards I received personally,' Denton says today. 'I am by nature a fairly insular person. I'm not easy to get to know and I do tend to keep to myself a lot. And sometimes I feel I have unnecessarily cut myself off. And I realised that I wasn't as cut off as I thought I was.

'There's only one lesson to be drawn from death and that is life must be cherished. For all the sorrow and the loss, I came out of it feeling strangely positive. OK, I cannot bring this man back, I cannot undo this, but life is good and there are good people around me. I must be a good enough person to have good people around me. I felt, even in death, my father gave me something.'

Denton prepares to make his way home. Jennifer Byrne is on the pub TV hosting *The 7.30 Report*. In a busy two-income household there are family commitments. The 'twisted' Andrew Denton appears to have departed. Now, as the pub door swings open and we feel a blast of chilly Sydney winter, the other one leaves too.

*July 1997*

*Andrew Denton went into morning radio on Triple M in Sydney and then, in 2003, returned to the ABC, for which his* Enough Rope *interview series has been a popular and critical success.*

# John Hewson

We are about to arrive at the heart of the passion of John Hewson. He presses the buzzer of a garage and there's a short James Bond moment while we wait to see what's behind the door. It's a beautiful red 1948 MG TC convertible. He tenderly peels off the cover. 'Trucks pull up next to me and say, "Great car," ' he says.

Beautiful cars got him into trouble when he was a politician, but it doesn't matter now. The fabled Ferrari that Paul Keating loved to mock is in storage, so we climb back into his old Mercedes 560 SEL with its *Cotton Club* soundtrack cassette and drive through Sydney. He talks about 'the other side' that people never really saw – his appearance as himself on the current affairs spoof *Frontline*, the day he abseiled down a building and was interviewed about the economy halfway

down, the time he went tenpin bowling on Andrew Denton's show. He talks about growing up in Sydney's Kogarah and comparing notes on the suburb many years later with fellow Kogarian Clive James.

You get the impression that his desire to be seen as something more than the cardboard economist even today continues to be thwarted. The 46-year-old up-and-comer of 1993 – photographed jogging and posing with an Afghan dog, playing a saxophone wearing sunglasses, sitting on his Ferrari wearing shorts, singlet and headphones – is now 57 and looking it.

Eleven years after being the man who should have been Prime Minister, Hewson says it's fine that he's misunderstood, because he is used to it. Back then, he says, no one got him. 'Very few journos took the time or trouble to understand you as a person,' he says. Keating nailed him by calling him, among many other things, the 'cold fish washed ashore by the recession', 'the feral abacus' and 'the visiting professor'. His image as an economic zealot was thus preserved in formaldehyde. 'He set out to tag me and he tagged me reasonably well,' Hewson says, not with bitterness but with admiration.

But, like every image, it was never the whole story.

Last August, John Hewson re-emerged in the public eye in the strangest manner. His name appeared in the newspapers attached to some 'rumours' – or, as the reports said, a 'swirl of speculation' – about his health and marriage.

After 11 years as the forgotten man of Australian politics, Hewson was fleetingly a story again. And one, apparently, with a bit of mystery. There were hints of a drinking problem, a nervous breakdown, marriage problems. '[The media] were camping outside my house for a while,' he says. 'Yesterday,' said Adelaide's *Advertiser* newspaper in August last year, 'he answered the door unshaven and barefoot, looking like a man who had just woken from a deep sleep.'

The reality is, he says, that he was writing his *Australian Financial Review* column at home that day. And he'd been coping with the effects of a virus picked up on a business trip in Asia. Immediately, Hewson scaled back his punishing schedule, had extensive tests and took stock.

'I was absolutely exhausted,' he says in his Sydney office. 'My doctor said, "How long since you've had a medical?" and I had to admit to him I'd never had one.'

It had been a build-up of too much work and not enough of what Kath and Kim would call 'me time'. Even his rare holidays were interrupted. 'We went to Bali with the kids for a few days in the late '80s,' he remembers. 'I had this book I wanted to read and I got out on a beach chair and it was the first time I'd been able to do anything like that in a long time. Feller came up. "You're John Hewson, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, unfortunately." He sat down at the end of the banana chair and three hours later he was still there redesigning health policy. I used to send the kids down to the eating hall in the evening to check whether he was there so I could have dinner.'

Even if the rumours were nasty and politically inspired, people around the place were talking. 'I know,' he says now, 'I've been treated for a nervous breakdown. All that stuff I just took as people taking the opportunity when you're down to give you a kick.'

Silence is best, he says. But he will say that while there was no nervous breakdown and no alcohol problem, he was exhausted. And it is true that he and his second wife, Carolyn, have split. The couple have a nine-year-old daughter. 'She accepts it,' Hewson says of his daughter. 'Unfortunately, a lot of children in her school are in the same position.'

The other side of Hewson hasn't had much of an airing. He's been painted – by Paul Keating, mainly – as having lived a life of privilege, a top-end-of-towner oblivious to the

real experiences of the people he sought to represent. But Hewson's life has not been as easy as he might have made it look when he became rich and successful.

After separating from his first wife, Margaret, in 1985, he married Carolyn Somerville in 1988, a formidable figure in investment banking whom Hewson's biographer, Christine Wallace, describes as an 'upper-middle-class blonde' who 'looked like John, spoke John's language and, best of all, could work a room almost better than him'. She was 'the wife from central casting'.

The Hewsons were the pin-up power couple: glamorous, achieving, ambitious and rich. They were both used to crushing hours at the office. When Hewson entered politics in 1987, the work rate and the pressure only increased.

The Hewsons' life might have looked perfect, but the couple spent eight years trying to conceive a child. Finally pregnant, in 1993 Carolyn had a much-publicised miscarriage at 20 weeks. 'It was traumatic,' John Hewson says. 'I was with her when the doctor was doing the ultrasound. The nurse said, "This baby is no longer alive." I said to Carolyn after that, "We'll try and create a more stress-free environment."'

Carolyn and John scaled back a little, but obviously not enough. Their power careers, with the big double income, hurt the marriage. Carolyn says that from the age of three months to five years, their daughter flew with her to Adelaide once a month so her mother could attend board meetings.

Carolyn says she regularly used babysitters, and was grateful for her parents' support when they were in Adelaide, but she was reluctant to employ a live-in nanny because 'you want to be the one that brings them up'. So something had to give in their high-wire act. 'If we'd had live-in help, that would have been ideal. I made a choice and decided not to do that, and it made it much harder.

'If you are going to embark on a dual career and have a family, you have to surround yourself with a good support system.'

Asked whether the split with Carolyn was his worst life experience, Hewson mentions the death of his mother in the early 1980s and talks about perspective. 'When [our daughter] was very small she had to have a little bit of brain surgery. Carolyn and I were feeling pretty ordinary about this. We were out there at the children's hospital . . . and she'd come out of surgery, and there was a young family with a little boy in the bed next to us. They were around the bed and we heard the doctor say the brain tumour he had was terminal and he had very little time to live. Our concerns seemed to pale into insignificance compared to the magnitude of what they were going through.'

Hewson takes me to the huge house in Rose Bay that the couple have been renovating for three years. It's an exhaustive tour through an unfinished site – stepladders, sawdust and electrical wires everywhere. He points out the pool, the tennis court, the billiard room, the gym (with rubber floor), the 'brag wall' with photos of Hewson with powerful people, the 14-car downstairs garage, his collection of model ships, his young daughter's bedroom, sitting room and balcony. Hewson shows me a guest room in which former Liberal Premier Richard Court used to stay when in Sydney. Poignantly, and without apparent emotion, he points out a massive piece of lumber, which was to be Carolyn's desk in her study.

The showing is conducted with a great passion for detail, but with a slightly unnerving objectivity. It could be a tour by a real estate agent or a proud mate rather than a man whose family may never live here. 'People who have seen it have called it one of the best non-waterfront homes in Australia,' he says. He doesn't know what they'll do with the house now.

Earlier, he had spoken of his desire to live well stemming from his struggling background. The first of four children, Hewson lived with his grandmother until the age of 10, when his parents could afford to buy a small house. His brother and he shared the veranda at the back, which was to prove a salutary experience. 'I got a bit enamoured with bigger houses and things like that,' he says.

But big, expensive houses don't mean all that much if they are not family homes. Carolyn Hewson concedes they both worked too hard. 'It's the ethic we both have, the Protestant work ethic,' she says in a telephone call. Combining two super-careers with bringing up a young child proved too much to handle. 'Probably I realised during last year that the pace couldn't continue. I finally succumbed to the fact that even I had to pull back. I thought I could manage it all but in the end I couldn't. There was this belief that we could both do it, but in the long term you can't.'

Carolyn Hewson retired from two boards, leaving six others. 'That was a relief physically, emotionally and mentally,' she says.

The couple's priority is the welfare of their daughter. 'The four children are incredibly important to us,' she says. (John Hewson has three children from his first marriage.) 'I'm very disappointed and sad about what's happened. We are still friends, we still talk a lot.'

In an olde English pub in Woollahra, Hewson sits down at a booth in the near darkness. It's full of business types having after-work drinks ('What are you doing in this den of iniquity?' an acquaintance yells at Hewson). 'We talk four or five times a day,' he says of Carolyn. 'There are no ill feelings at all. She's got to destress her life.' He adds: 'I never wanted to separate from either wife . . . I was disappointed but I understand. It was accumulated stress . . . We had virtually no time to

ourselves. After politics we were both working very hard to establish new careers.'

In 2002 he took on the role of dean of the Macquarie University Graduate School of Management, which by all accounts has been a controversial tenure. Hewson has had several periods of extended leave from the position and reportedly a clash with the university's vice-chancellor over his style. His deputy, Richard Dunford, is acting dean. Neither the university nor Hewson would elaborate.

There was hard work and pressure everywhere. The 100-hour weeks he says he was putting in – he oversaw a major report released last year on corporate governance; he develops properties and businesses; he's on the speaking circuit – mean Hewson was choosing to play the corporate superhero, at great cost to life outside the office. Hasn't he read these feature articles on the new man scaling back for his family? 'The only person you resent is yourself,' he says, 'because you allowed these things to drift and you didn't do anything about it.'

The devastating election loss in 1993 might be the last time a lot of people gave John Hewson so much as a passing thought. If you don't attend conferences or read the opinion page of the *Financial Review*, then Hewson is completely off the radar, fixed in the public imagination as the suit who lost the 'unloseable' election, the uber-yuppie who never connected with the Australian people.

He went into that election advocating a goods-and-services tax that the public was frightened of and which he sold badly, epitomised by a famous interview with Mike Willesee when he couldn't explain the application of the tax on a birthday cake. 'I ran into Mike Willesee at a school function and he said, "You must hate me," ' Hewson says. 'But I don't think it made that much difference. It was a very complicated issue.'

In the interests of transparency, he rolled out tonnes of policy months before the election. 'I put out a hell of a lot of information,' he says. 'I laid myself bare.

'I didn't expect to win the '93 election,' he says now. He was stoic publicly, but there was always going to be an emotional price to pay. 'On the exterior, he coped very well,' says Carolyn Hewson. 'In retrospect, I think internally it probably took a greater toll than anyone imagined. Particularly for a man, a very big public loss can be particularly hard to handle. I think for men generally their self-worth is bound up with their job. Women see themselves in terms of wider relationships.'

But the loss wasn't as shocking to Hewson as it was to others. 'Our polling went against the Liberal view that Keating was dead meat. The clear message was that Keating deserved his chance. Hewson, he's a good young guy, he's got some bright ideas, he could do with a bit more time.'

But there wasn't any more time. And, of course, there was Paul Keating. Keating is a subject on which Hewson is interesting, notably because of his fascination with the man who destroyed him. 'I quite respect him, actually,' Hewson says, 'which got me in a lot of strife from people in the Liberal Party.'

Keating treated Hewson as easy meat: rich and wooden with elitist passions and limited political smarts who, despite sharing Keating's working-class origins, constantly painted him as a silvertail. 'I found that quite incredible, actually,' Hewson says. 'At the time we were living in Double Bay and Keating was living in Elizabeth Bay. I could almost throw a stone from my house to his. He had a Mercedes and, OK, I had a Ferrari. It used to be a bit annoying that you could never get heard on that.'

His poor political radar, such as driving a Ferrari during a

bad recession, killed him, many thought. He could never understand why the Australian people would begrudge a boy who grew up in a 'nine-square fibro house in the western suburbs of Sydney' driving a luxury car. Critics say it was a good example of Hewson not getting it. 'It should have been a plus,' Hewson says quietly. 'It was a minus.'

And hell rained down on him when he said of the childless NSW Labor leader Bob Carr: 'You've got to be suspicious of a guy that doesn't drive and doesn't like kids and things like that.'

But Keating was more destructive than any other factor in Hewson's political death. Hewson was a new boy in parliament and couldn't cope with Labor's brutal tactics.

'The expression on John's face after he had copped a serve from Keating was one of sadness and despair,' says then Liberal Federal Treasurer Ron Walker. 'He wasn't laughing it off. He didn't like the rough and tumble. Some people can cope, some can't.'

But now Hewson talks of his nemesis with admiration. 'On the first day back after the '93 election Keating said, "Come over here, I want to talk to you." We went behind a pole. "I just want to say one thing to you. How are you? You must be shattered." I said, "I'm fine, I didn't actually expect to do as well as we did . . ." He said, "I want to say to you that I said some pretty nasty things about you in the last few years and I just want you to know that I really didn't mean them. I quite respect you and admire you." I said, "Thanks for that, it does mean a lot to me."

'I think I know Keating pretty well. I've really studied him in-depth. I read all of Jack Lang, for example, to find out where he got his sentences from. "Dog returning to his vomit" comes from Lang, doesn't come from Keating.'

If his observations – even about himself – often sound like a

journalist's, that's because he has been a columnist for more than 20 years. Before entering politics in the early 1980s he wrote on the economy for *Business Review Weekly* magazine. After '93, he waited a couple of years until he saw it as appropriate to continue writing about politics.

In his weekly *Australian Financial Review* column, Hewson is regularly critical of the Coalition and John Howard, a man who 'disappoints me because he sold himself as a conviction politician when he's not'. It's not so much Howard's policy flip-flopping, though, that Hewson-watchers talk about, it's more the personal enmity between the pair.

His readers might sometimes find it hard to pick his politics today. Just as another formerly hard-line Liberal, Malcolm Fraser, now comes over almost as a social progressive, Hewson appears to identify more with Keating now than with his former colleagues. He is pro-refugee, reconciliation, republic and Kyoto-type protocols on the environment. He is against the war in Iraq (he supported the Labor-led first in 1990) and believes Howard 'manipulated prejudice' over Tampa.

Hewson says he is an independent commentator ('I'm not tied to any particular line'); the Liberals say he's bitter and twisted (Hewson has accused John Howard of putting Tony Abbott in Hewson's office as a 'spy'). Whatever the case, the feelings of the Liberals towards him have gone from poisonous a few years ago to indifference now. 'Obviously his hatred of Tony [Abbott] and John [Howard] deeply colours his views, which are completely out of sync with reality,' said a senior Liberal who declined to be named. 'The early criticisms hurt. You are always dented to a degree by criticisms of a former leader but as they got more frequent they hurt less. Hewson and [Malcolm] Fraser cry wolf on a regular basis, so no one takes any notice of them.'

Paul Keating and Malcolm Fraser declined to comment for this article.

One thing is certain: Hewson's lingering incendiary feelings towards Howard. Hewson relates this story: 'I said to him, "Go away with one thought. That is, I am going to be able to leave this place, this political scene, with the clear knowledge that I've only ever supported the person that was leading the party. I've never worked against anybody, whether I liked him or I didn't . . . I've only been loyal to the leader of the day. That's something you can never say. You've only been disloyal to every leader." And he was very annoyed. He walked out and slammed the door.'

Ten years on, the Liberal freeze hasn't thawed. Hewson is speaking at a business function in Melbourne. In a stunning non sequitur during his speech to the training industry, he slightly misquotes some senior Liberals. 'It's the 20th anniversary of a very famous mobile phone call between Andrew Peacock and Jeff Kennett where Jeff had apparently called Howard an effing little rodent.' The crowd laughs. 'But back to the topic.'

Latham has Howard rattled, Hewson tells the room; Howard has got Latham wrong. Latham says parents should read books to kids, so there's Howard 'sitting in front of classrooms in Western Australia looking like a spare school lunch in the playground'.

He makes with the jokes. Talking about the underwear company Bendon and its association with Elle Macpherson, he says, 'I'm an economist, the sort of person who would have married Elle Macpherson for the money.'

His most oft-used sentence is here again. 'I lost an election by telling the truth and putting a whole lot of policy detail out there. You can tune out now and say, "That guy's full of shit," and move on or take some lessons.'

There's a political cliché that it's better to have people inside your tent pissing out than the other way around. Hewson's outside-the-tent schtick is well practised and can startle people. 'I had a vision of you as a straight, staid politician,' a woman says from the floor. 'And you've been redeemed.'

Former colleagues believe it is sad that Hewson has cut links with the Liberal Party. 'I think he took the fact that he had lost the chance to be prime minister very personally,' says Ron Walker. 'I think in the end John hated politics.'

Despite Labor's reputation for internecine brutality, it's the Liberals who have always treated its ex-leaders badly. 'Maybe there's a cultural fault line in the Liberal Party that for whatever reason we can't keep our former leaders in the tent,' said a senior Liberal. 'Whitlam, Keating, Hawke, even though they hate each other, are all eulogised by Labor. If they turn up they are given a standing ovation.'

Carolyn Hewson says, 'From my perspective, he was the goalie in the World Cup final and he let through the losing goal, but there were 10 other players. He was perceived as totally responsible for the loss.'

Hewson's deputy in the '93 campaign, Dr Michael Wooldridge, said: 'What happened to him was as brutal as I have witnessed in my 15 years in politics.' He declined to elaborate, but is believed to mean Hewson's treatment at the hands of Liberal colleagues.

The Hewsons became used to attacks from the Liberals and the media, Carolyn Hewson says. Of the recent rumours about her husband, she says, 'I have read so much stuff that's wrong, so I had to steel myself yet again, hold my head up and go out there again.' This time, though, she hit back. She rang the editors of some newspapers that had run the articles mentioning the rumours. 'I told them, "What you said was

wrong",' she says. '"I hope in the future you will encourage your journalists to check their stories more carefully".'

Ron Walker says it's not too late for a reconciliation. 'I often hear him say, "The party's against me", but the party would embrace him tomorrow. He is such an intelligent, knowledgeable person and I think it's a pity he's totally turned his back on the party that gave him so much.'

How will he be remembered? 'In an economic sense he was a visionary,' says Wooldridge, 'but he left himself open to being misrepresented.'

'He'll be remembered as a failed experiment,' said the senior Liberal. 'A bloke who through no fault of his own got to the leadership of the party. He came from where, we do not know, and he's gone back there. He had no roots in the party. No one knew the guy. He lost the unloseable election. That's his epitaph.'

As we drive along, Hewson, in name-checking Paul Keating yet again, appears to offer his own political obituary. 'Keating had it right,' he says. 'Canberra is full of people who are shooting rockets and end up falling to the ground as dead sticks.'

*April 2004*

*John Hewson still writes an occasional column for* The Australian Financial Review. *He and Carolyn share custody of their nine-year-old daughter.*

# Junie Morosi

We are sitting on a sumptuously soft couch in a darkened room. The glow of a circle of candles interrupts the gloom. Incense adds the required New Age pungency, and a poster on the wall the required frolicking dolphins.

On another wall is a huge painting, a gorgeous depiction of a semi-clad young love goddess ('. . . she sits with the deer drinking beneath her,' says the inscription, 'the fox gazing into the distance and the lionness guarding her side'). You would be forgiven for struggling with the notion that you have just stepped off the street of a Canberra suburb.

A member of the Wyuna housing co-operative greets us. He tells us that 'apathy is the disease and I am healing'. Nine days ago, he wrote on the communal whiteboard in the kitchen: 'We are God. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile.'

'That message has stayed up there longer than any other.' He beams. 'I got it from *Star Trek*, which is a good example of co-operative living. There is an incredible amount of higher wisdom in the story constructs.'

Back here on Earth, from her house behind this community area, the co-op's most famous member, Junie Morosi, arrives, wearing a flowing black and purple dress with a cross nestling on her chest. She brings into the room a quiet grace and, at 62, an undeniable natural beauty.

'I am happy to talk about my past,' she says, 'but what I'm doing now is very important.'

Today she is a big drawcard at New Age festivals, the chief voice for co-operative living in Australia, a sort of super hippie, not unlike her friend Jim Cairns, who still sits at a card table outside markets selling his own message. No one could accuse either of selling out on their beliefs.

Morosi's mission is to convince society that this is the way to live. 'The hippies thought and Nimbin thought and the Down to Earth movement thought that all we had to do was get together, which wasn't true. We realised we had to develop skills. Now we are developing skills like conflict resolution, win-win approach, appropriate assertiveness, mapping out solutions – these are all tools.'

She's been forced to map out a few solutions of her own, too. What is most confronting about Junie Morosi is her calm capacity for forgiveness. Of her brutal father who, when she was a child, would wake her for beatings. Of the white-bread male-dominated Australian political bureaucracy of 1974, which found in her a convenient candidate for demonisation. And of the frightened Australian people, jittery even today.

'A few months ago in an article entitled "Women we love to hate", it was said I was a threat to every Australian home,' she says. 'I suppose with my present state of understanding I can

see where they are coming from. Any independent woman who is not going to pretend to be inferior or really believes she is not inferior is a threat.'

Twenty years later, the storm is meant to have passed, we are meant to have grown up, differentness and specialness (if you are a woman) no longer mean automatic suspicion and often exclusion, and gang tackles from the media do not always bring down their prey. We are, dare it be said, a little less afraid.

For Junie Morosi all this comes just a little late.

Only a few months after the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Whitlam Government, Labor looks about as ravaged as it can get. But in 1975, when the light still shone on the hill, Ms Morosi found herself a key player in an unprecedented political maelstrom.

And now she's undergoing the cathartic process of writing her autobiography. She thought it would take four months. It has taken six years. And it is producing some curious reactions. 'I realised that writing the book had let out a lot of stuff that I didn't actually feel any more. So I had a different interpretation of what had happened.'

Her time as private secretary to Dr Jim Cairns, the then treasurer and deputy prime minister, was short but explosive and damaged both their careers.

For Dr Cairns it was said to have meant his relegation to the backbenches and out of politics. For Morosi, burdened by the mythology that instantly accompanied the words 'the Morosi affair', it meant the end of senior public service jobs and the attempt to make a new life.

The threads of sexism and fear of the exotic that informed that period of history now look faintly absurd. She has been

described as the 'long, tall shadow' of the Labor Party, and, later, 'an antipodean Cleopatra' and 'the archetypal femme fatale'. Morosi's contributing role in the downfall of Dr Cairns and Labor said more about Australia in the mid-1970s than it ever did about her.

'Lionel Murphy said if I'd been five foot three, wore glasses and was fat and dumpy, nobody would have said anything,' she says today. 'There was an incredible amount of sexism . . . I went through a very angry period from 16 to 21 when I could have hated men forever.'

Her story began in Shanghai, where she was born to an Italian father and Portuguese mother, both of whom had Chinese blood. The Morosis moved to Manila when Junie was four, where she experienced her first fear.

'I lived through the war from seven to 11 when the Japanese occupied the Philippines. It was hell. The Japanese were very tyrannical. Shootings were prevalent, every day. I was seven and to me it was, frankly, how life was . . .

'We had to bow to the Japanese soldiers and I got butted on the head once for not bowing low enough, so I learnt to avoid that road. We had to learn Japanese at school, which was a very hated thing; they didn't want the imposition of someone else's culture upon theirs.'

At 15, Junie married Carlos Navarro, a Filipino–Spanish boy, and at 16 had the first of three boys with him, one a year. 'If your parents find out you've got a boyfriend, you get married and that's what happened. However, I wasn't averse to the idea because I couldn't wait to get out of my dad's house. Dad wasn't exactly sweetness and light, he was a patriarchal . . . I suppose I could thank him for the strength to have identified patriarchy and dealt with it in my life.

'He was a very violent man. He would regularly beat me. For trivial things. If he was in a bad mood it was enough. If he came home and he wasn't feeling very good and he didn't feel like taking it out on Mum, which he didn't because she was a very loving wife, he'd generally take it out on the kids because the kids he saw as taking time away from him.

'I have vivid memories of being awoken to beatings in the middle of the night for no reason. I was seven, eight.'

Did she ever speak to her father again? 'Yes, I went back regularly. I don't think he ever accepted me. My father died in Manila in 1970. I'd learnt I could get my grandfather to do what I wanted – he was crazy about me, I could do nothing wrong. My troubles only started when he died; before that I was the princess around the place. I told everyone I wanted to be a pilot; everyone laughed. My grandfather said, "She can do what she wants, she'll find a way."

'If my father was nasty, my grandfather was lovely. So it wasn't clever or intelligent to lump into a generalisation every man. However, they did have something in common. My father was a replica of my grandfather, just that he didn't direct it at me. My grandfather was the same with his children . . . "The Godfather" had nothing on him.

'I decided I had to be able to survive without a man, because no man will accept who I truly am.'

Did she forgive her father? A pause. 'I did forgive him. I felt like by the time I was 22 I'd become aware of yoga, Buddhist teachings and I sort of felt like . . . maybe I should say I thought I forgave him. It happened in my head. At the time I thought I [had]. I found out 30 years later I had a lot of anger about what happened.'

Highly intelligent and ambitious, Junie felt trapped in her marriage and needed a bigger world than a slum town on the outskirts of Manila. 'There's no divorce in the Philippines,

so I had to leave the country so I could free myself of that situation. He was two years older – 17 years old – what do you expect? He got a job as a salesman with a soft-drink company. I was a reporter with a Spanish newspaper, *The Voice of Manila*, at uni and having children. It was hectic but I had a lot of energy.'

She lived for two years with Carlos and his parents in the very poor section of town. 'I never thought I would stay there. It was a step along the way. Life was an adventure to be lived. I was somewhat amazed to see his family didn't want that for him.

'He didn't want to kick on, he had his cronies. In a slum village you have pretty good interpersonal relationships or you wouldn't survive. I was a stranger in the place . . . I can't say I blamed him.'

Morosi got a job in the travel industry in Manila, which opened a door in Australia. Her introduction to the job was a prelude to some of the attitudes she would encounter in years to come.

'I was classified as a receptionist, my first day. I'd been their supervisor of the reservations office in the Philippines, so [they wanted me to take] a couple of steps down. When I questioned it, they said, "Women can't be travel consultants, we only have men . . . " I said that's not the contract I came here on and I would seek employment elsewhere.'

Later, in an interview for a position on the Commission for Community Relations, a precursor to the Human Rights Commission, Morosi had a similar experience. 'I was in [Attorney-General] Lionel Murphy's office. Lionel's sitting behind his desk and this public-service man is saying to me, "Can you type?" Here I am as deputy commissioner for this newly created commission.

'Lionel said, "I don't think you better ask her that

question." The public-service man looked genuinely confused. I said, "If I was a man sitting here, you wouldn't be asking that."'

One day she was at an airport waiting for a plane and Jim Cairns' book *The Quiet Revolution* 'kind of fell into my hands'. 'I thought, "I'd like to meet this man, because he seems to be addressing my areas of concern",' she says.

It was to become one of the most significant meetings in Australian political history: a progressive-thinking treasurer unafraid to express his sometimes-radical views, and an attractive, forthright woman whom Dr Cairns clearly admired. And, controversially for the times, Dr Cairns appeared to treat Junie Morosi as an equal.

There was speculation about an affair, which neither chose to disavow. A few months into her job with Dr Cairns, the treasurer gave an interview to a newspaper reporter during which he said he felt 'a certain kind of love' for Morosi. Even though the quote was, according to Ms Morosi, off the record and severely out of context, it scandalised the media and the public and was a prelude to the upheaval that led to Gough Whitlam's sacking.

Neither has discussed publicly the suggestions of an affair. 'I've maintained from the first time I was asked that question that the issue here is my right to my private life and to my professional life. That were I a man, that would not be an issue, and therefore it is not an issue whether I've gone to bed with Jim Cairns or not. Or anyone else for that matter. [I've never answered] because it will take away the actual focus, trivialise it.

'It was very shocking and, to my very activist mode and in terms of human rights it seemed incredibly unfair. I felt it was a witch-hunt . . .'

New Age music tinkles in the background. Morosi puts

her hands together and gently nods in greetings to a fellow co-operative member.

'I don't believe in right and wrong. For me there is no right and wrong. There is only experience and what I learn from it. I didn't judge anyone, I didn't blame anyone. From their perspective they were doing what they had to do, so I couldn't get really angry. I was angry at the fact that I was hurt. I was angry that I couldn't get my job. But I wasn't blaming anyone in particular.'

So that was it. It took 13 years, but she'd managed to fade away from fame. Or so she thought. 'When this thing blew up again and again and again and again it became more confusing.

'I thought at the end of that day I had it solved. It kept on coming back.'

It came back in 1988 when the then prime minister Bob Hawke launched an inquiry into a $133,000 grant to the Wyuna housing co-operative, a group of houses in the Canberra suburb of Kambah, whose membership included 10 people from the Morosi family. A Tandberg cartoon of the time featured Bob Hawke saying, 'Now she might stuff my government!'

'Hawke initiated that attack,' Morosi says now. 'To call a press conference over a grant of $133,000 is pathetic – his idea of getting something into the newspapers. I was incredibly angry about it. I felt worse than I did in '74, '75. I can handle things myself. But [the pain] expanded because my family was included. They harassed my mother, my brothers, my sisters, my children; they shattered the ordinariness of the lives of my family and invaded their privacy.'

The saga, resolved four years after Hawke initiated it, 'sort of shook everything I was involved in . . . so many people seemed to be damaged'. Morosi lost $250,000, which included a house and an ice-cream outlet called Gaelian (after her fourth son). 'I lost three businesses, a house and my marriage,' she says now.

Morosi's first three sons are all in middle age. William, 44, works with a cleaning company, Larry, 42, is an artist, and Michael, 43, is a mechanic who keeps a mobile home on this property. 'He's here as a member of Wyuna, travels for three months at a time; there's a couple of others in the community who do the same thing.'

She remembers acting more like an older sister to the boys. 'I'd be called in to the principal's rather often, and I'd be wearing my Qantas uniform and I'd pass these rows of boys, and they'd be hooting and whistling and there'd be three kids looking in the opposite direction.

'I guess I never really looked like a mother, more an older sister. My three older children were brought up a lot by my mother because I was in a career. I couldn't have had a career otherwise. The boys dealt with her as mother and me as the playmate who came back and brought them presents and went to movies with them.'

Morosi met David Ditchburn as a Qantas client in the 1960s. They were married for 23 years, splitting in 1986, not long after the stressful Wyuna crisis. They have a son, Gaelian, born 17 years ago when Morosi was 45.

A passionate advocate of natural childbirth, breastfeeding and nurturing children, Morosi gave Gaelian the classic 'free' upbringing, tempered by his more conventional father.

Gaelian spends half the time at the co-op and the other half with his father. 'Gaelian is one of my best friends,' Morosi says. 'It's amazing when a son becomes a friend.'

There are 60 members of Wyuna, 22 of those residents in several houses in the area. Everyone in the co-op pays rent, which goes into a central fund. She hopes Wyuna will one day have enough money for other projects, such as offering low-interest loans to its members.

'The human race evolved to where it is through co-operation,

not competition,' she says. 'We've forgotten how to live together.'

She keeps in contact with Jim Cairns, often phoning him at his farm in Narre Warren. 'He has a lovely farm, he loves writing, he still goes to the markets and gets his connection with people, which is for him very important,' she says. 'Jim will go down in history as one of the greatest men this country has ever known. I still have great admiration and love for the man, and I know that thousands of other people feel the same way.'

Junie Morosi knows that Jim Cairns' quote about having 'a certain kind of love' for her will haunt her for the rest of her life. 'Jim volunteered a statement, off the record, that you wouldn't hire someone to work for you that you didn't trust or have faith in,' she says now. 'In fact, you could say, "As I love the Vietnamese people, I'd have to say I love Junie if she's to work for me." He was saying that in the context of all his staff.

'If there's anything I will . . . be remembered for it is to say it is my right to go to bed with who I want to go to bed with, and you will judge me on my professional conduct, which is professional. The whole world is saying this now. In those days [that view] was perhaps a little ahead of its time.'

Was it naive of Dr Cairns to speak of his private secretary and love in the same breath? 'Yes and no,' she says. 'I believe that Jim has a disarming directness, frankness, integrity; that's because he tells the truth as he sees it. He's not someone you can bludgeon. Part of that strength was saying things as he felt them. In this instance it could be seen as naivety, but it was that naivety that brought him to be deputy prime minister. Without that he wouldn't have been where he was.'

Many years since the fires of social conscience were lit, Morosi is still fighting for love, peace and understanding, in about equal measure. Those were dangerous words 20 years ago. Especially 'love'.

'Rupert Murdoch said sex and politics is the best way to sell papers and I think he had a lot to do with keeping the thing going,' she says. '[A friend] said, "You'll probably go down forever in history because what you've done is touched on the word 'love' and endeavoured to give it your meaning." And Jim, whether he knew it or not, was doing the same thing.

'Today it's quite OK for a man to say, "I love you." When I first used the word "love" in parliament – "We should look at these things with love . . ." – they were so horrified, to introduce this really dirty four-letter word into Parliament House. Well, I believe it had a place and that hate ultimately is less powerful than love, and if you can't love – and most people can't love still – let us try for acceptance.'

We walk near the co-op. After the formality of an interview, it offers a chance to study this woman. Orwell said that at 50 we get the face we deserve, and Junie Morosi has hers. Her face is that of a happy person with strong views, the face of a woman who was single-minded enough not to let anything destroy her, as it might have.

In a clearing there are some beautiful young gum trees straining skyward. Behind them, off in the distance, is the blue outline of a mountain range. She calls this the suburbs ('It's no Nimbin') but it's still very peaceful. 'I am a naturally optimistic person and in my life I have always managed to find a peaceful solution,' she says.

In the end, Junie Morosi's story is about peace. After a long struggle to affirm the rights of women, the rights of people who want to live collectively, and the right not to be afraid of a pack that is afraid itself, she has found peace here. This is not the way for everyone to live, of course, but its most

famous advocate exudes a serenity that could be its best advertisement.

*April 1996*

*Six years after this interview, Jim Cairns told a journalist that he and Ms Morosi had indeed had the affair that had been speculated about for years.*

# Keith Lamb

On Tuesday night, Keith Lamb hopes to go backstage at the Palais Theatre in St Kilda and say hello to Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt of the British group Status Quo. It will be Old Rockers' Week for Quo, the denim-clad '70s superstars, and Lamb, formerly of Hush, Australia's garish and rather raucous response to the Glitter Band.

Lamb has been looking forward to catching up with the band for whom he co-wrote four hit singles in the early 1970s (royalty cheques still arrive). Hanging out with former rock stars will be for Lamb a reminder of better times: when he was a pop star himself, when songs he wrote went to the top of the charts, when the money rolled into his bank account, and when his life had not been changed irrevocably by the onset of schizophrenia.

His story is an instructive example of how fickle pop stardom is, and how unpredictable the road can be when it is taken away. In some ways his story is heartbreaking. But it is also a story of friendship, courage and managing to live with schizophrenia.

Keith Lamb is now 45. To understand his life, you have to go back to 1973 and the Victorian coastal town of Warrnambool. It was here, as a curly-haired glam rocker wearing an indiscreet amount of satin, Lamb asked a teenager for directions to another Palais Theatre, this one Warrnambool's historic dance hall often used for 50/50s and the occasional pop concert.

Down there, turn left, she said, you can't miss it. Thanks, he said. Oh, and why didn't she come to the show tonight? He said he was in a band called Hush and they were playing that night at the Palais. He said he would put her name on the door. He remembers now he thought she had nice green eyes.

The teenager, Louise Howland, had never heard of Hush, but went along anyway. The concert was fun, even though she 'didn't watch that hard'. There was a lot of colour and movement, possibly more than Warrnambool was used to. Hush's mascots, a couple of huge fire-breathing silk dragons, prowled the stage.

The band wore a range of satin and velvet pants and flowing brunch coats and scarves tied at the throat and spilling down the musicians' skinny chests which, being 1973, were mandatorily exposed. On stage it was business as usual. Guitarist Les Gock ground his groin into his Flying Vee guitar. Drummer 'Smiley' Pailthorpe banged away, mouth agape and shirt open to, and tied at, the navel.

Hush were Australia's biggest glam rock band, taking their cue from the wave of British glitter groups with their powder-blue eyeshadow, over-conditioned locks and improbable bumps

in their trousers. It was the era of boy rock stars trying to be very male and very effeminate at the same time. They were very pretty, but they were lusty swordsmen, too. Out for it. Dress-ups with a vengeance. Indeed, Hush had a rule: they were never to wear denim on stage. Apart from that, they made things up as they went along.

Keith Lamb was a roguish Englishman with a wicked grin who knew the value of a good performance. He would jump around the stage, whooping and hollering into the mike, little hiccups and moans, sexy if you were 16, ridiculous histrionics if you were the parents waiting outside. To cap off the set, he'd wheel around and effect a couple of big kicks into the air, revealing to the sea of teenagers the enormity of the man's magnificent platform heels.

Lamb leapt around, not believing his luck. Just by forming a band, he'd been given the keys to the 'City of Rock'. All of a sudden, he had permission to do exactly as he liked. It was the wild ride every boy dreamed of. Lamb had arrived from England when he was 17, full of energy and ambition. All he'd ever wanted to do was be in a band, and here he was, watching reality match expectation, feeling the screams of a roomful of young girls course through his body. It was nice work if you could get it.

The crowd was wild. But Louise Howland, a pretty blonde girl whose interests ran more to the classical piano she was studying, was able to keep a check on her hysteria. They were just a fun pop band, after all. It was the first and last time she ever saw Hush perform, although in subsequent years she followed their career on television and radio.

Before the show, Lamb and Howland talked and exchanged addresses. For the next two or three years, they had a 'postcard' relationship. The pair then lost contact, but an extraordinary relationship had been ignited, involving sadness, courage and

a will to prevail over forces that, many times in Lamb's life, could have destroyed him.

But now, Lamb was on his way. With Les Gock, a glamorous and talented guitarist born in Australia to Chinese parents, Lamb had formed Hush. 'I don't know what percentage there is of kids who join a band and then play in front of 40,000 people,' Gock says. 'One minute you are a nobody, the next people are literally fainting in your presence.'

Unlike much of the earnest rock music of the '60s, which appealed to the brain, Hush's music was targeted at a different organ altogether. Hush, and other glam bands like Supernaut, were decidedly of the moment, like a butterfly – fluttering, garish, blown about in the breeze, and, in the end, doomed. And soon.

Hush rampaged on through the charts with their brand of vaudevillian rude-boy anthems, 'Walking', 'Get Rocked', 'Rough Tough and Ready', 'Glad All Over' and the number one 'Boney Moroney'. They appeared often on *Countdown*. 'We were 19 and indefatigable,' Les Gock remembers.

Howland, meanwhile, finished school and went into training to become a nurse. In the winter of 1977, Les Gock announced to the band at a pub in the Dandenongs that he thought they should break up. 'The band was going nowhere,' Gock says. 'I couldn't see we were going to make it overseas or progress any further. I knew I didn't want to be in that whole carnival atmosphere while the audience was heading to punk or the next thing that came along. I said, "Guys, I'm heading off." And the others agreed.'

It was at this time that things soured for Lamb. Looking back, the split probably broke his heart. Today, he says, 'It gave me up, I didn't give it up.'

Les Gock had read the signs: punk was on its way. Hush was going to look like glam-rock dinosaurs. They had had their

time. 'When it did finish, I thought, "Well, six years, that's about the right course",' Gock says. 'I was fairly philosophical.'

But Lamb hung on. Early in 1978, Lamb and Hush guitarist Jacques De Jongh formed Keith Lamb and the New Hush, an entity that lasted just two months. Lamb persevered, this time with the Keith Lamb Band. In a series of Spinal Tap-type name changes, the band became Larry, then Airport, then resurfaced as the Keith Lamb Band. Still, he was holding on to the rock life, even if it was by a fingernail.

By 1982, Gock had started a spectacular career in writing and recording jingles, which would make him the fortune his time in Hush had denied him, penning such memorable ads as 'This goes with that at Sussan' and the theme song for Australia's Bicentennial. A string of newspaper articles focused on the success story arising out of his unlikely glam-rock beginnings.

Keith Lamb's life, conversely, began to fall apart. 'Where Are They Now' articles said 'Singer Keith Lamb moved to rural Victoria'. Lamb was crushed by his pop career petering out. Hush and the camaraderie it offered and the public esteem it brought was the glue that held him together. It wasn't just a band, it was something he could feel a part of. It defined him.

Lamb had not prepared himself for the fact that stardom didn't last. He had become used to screaming crowds, but no musical permutation matched the chemistry of Hush. It was the one shot Lamb had in the locker. He had co-written four songs with Alan Lancaster of Status Quo – including 'Old Rag Blues', 'Over the Edge' and 'I Want The World To Know' – and the royalties he received from these began to assume a vital importance. He had spent up big when he was a star, and by the early 1980s much of it was gone.

By 1983, Lamb began to develop behavioural tendencies

that suggested a possible psychiatric condition. He tried to withdraw $4 million from a bank in Wangaratta, believing it to be royalties from Status Quo. The police were called, but no charges were laid. The story wound up on the front page of *Truth* newspaper. Lamb spent a night at Russell Street police station before being taken to a psychiatric hospital in Melbourne, where he stayed for two months.

Later, his condition was diagnosed as schizophrenia. Before that diagnosis, it seemed to Lamb that his life was running off the rails. His marriage ended, he sold his Sydney house and went back to England for two years, leaving his infant son and daughter with his wife.

A little afraid of schizophrenia, his family could not cope with Lamb's odd behaviour and decided that he should return to Australia, where he had made so much of his life and had been so happy. But back in Australia, Lamb's friends had moved on and up. He called on Gock and other members of Hush for help. They tried to look after him, but struggled. Eventually, a friend took him to the Salvation Army, where he stayed for a few weeks. He moved to Melbourne and soon found himself wandering aimlessly. He slept on the street, or at the Salvation Army, or found some space on the floors of friends' homes. He would go on epic walks, once, he says, from Melbourne to Wangaratta, sleeping on the side of the road.

'I wandered around, not knowing where to sleep,' he says as we walk along a beautiful road near his home outside Bendigo. 'Luckily, I had some money, and dossed down in a few cheapie, Crystal Palace-type numbers. I worried what would happen to me.'

At the hospital he met a psychiatric nurse whose face he vaguely recognised. It was Louise Howland, who was working there on a year's secondment to the research unit. Eleven

years after their meeting in Warrnambool, the couple were reunited in circumstances very different from the carefree days of 1973. Howland saw before her someone who needed a lot of care, without the cocky swagger; someone who had lost his independence.

A certain love developed between the two, more friendship than romance. She could not bear the idea of Lamb leaving hospital and going back onto the streets. She thought him 'such a special person', who'd been 'so lost for so many years'. Lamb weighed about six stone, was 'really unwell and he needed rehabilitation'.

Howland has given Lamb much encouragement over the years. She felt Lamb was 'too important to let go'. She suggested he move in with her in Seddon, in Melbourne's inner west, so she could get him back on his feet.

Lamb helped Howland renovate the house. They talked about resurrecting his career. They discussed the possibility of forming a musical duo. Howland offered him company and reassurance.

The pair decided to move to the country, to go and find some wide-open spaces that Seddon did not afford. They moved to Howland's family property just outside Bendigo, surrounded by their merlot-producing vineyard, the pale, ancient ghost gums that sit at the edge of a massive man-made dam and the country winters that freeze you to the bone.

Howland kept nursing, but branched into importing fabrics and paintings for Georges in Melbourne. Howland and Lamb launched a craft business called Raj Mahal, which exports threads, embroidery and other cottage items. 'He was so confident,' Howland says. 'He's done all the advertising and marketing. No one's too big for Keith to approach.'

Meanwhile, Howland played the piano. Lamb still enjoyed singing. Six years ago, the pair started up the duo they'd

talked about, working the clubs along the Murray, performing old jazz and cabaret standards.

At last, Lamb was back in showbusiness, even if the audiences were more interested in their beers than the music. But Lamb's voice sounded 'amazing', Louise remembers. 'The best night we had was with the Bandidos bikers in Cobram. They loved us. We also played at Puckapunyal once for the officers' mess.'

Their relationship remains as strong as ever. Lamb lives in Bendigo in Howland's business premises. Sometimes Lamb and Howland go to country markets and, rifling through the second-hand LP bins, happen across a Hush record. 'He's always pleased,' Howland says. He doesn't even laugh at the costumes. 'He thinks they were perfectly OK. It was serious work for him.'

Keith Lamb is walking through his beloved countryside around Bendigo, down the tracks in the scrub, along the little pathways, and around the edges of the dam, with an island smack in the middle. It's quite still here in the evenings, and Lamb and Howland sometimes amble up armed with repellent for the mosquitoes, and wonder at the peacefulness. 'It's a discovery,' Lamb says of the countryside.

Lamb is managing his illness, with Howland's help. When he is on medication, life is less of a struggle. 'Everything's going fine, you know?' he says. Howland says, 'Very occasionally, and usually when he's fairly well, he'll say, "You saved my life, I don't know where I'd be without you, you're my best friend in the world." But he's helped me plenty. He gets up every day and it's exciting; we come up with a million ideas.'

'It's been a battle,' Lamb says. 'The build-up of the disease . . . By getting thumped it prepares you a little. My major thump has been starvation of personal contact. Australian

people aren't exactly what you'd call good at hopping in the car and coming over, you know.'

Three years ago, Howland went on a blind date organised by her sister. Four months later, she married him. Lamb, very happy for the couple, went to the wedding. 'He thinks a lot of Lewis,' Howland says. 'He accepts and adapts to change very well.'

When he sees photos of Hush back in the '70s, he doesn't recognise himself. It is clearly another person with different aims now. He wants to contribute to the craft business, keep in touch with his 20-year-old son, Matthew, and 16-year-old daughter, Sarah. Matthew, who is apprenticed to a butcher ('Isn't that great?' he says, 'A Lamb working for a butcher!') plays the guitar and has been down to Bendigo from Sydney twice to visit. 'We're always on the phone,' Lamb says.

He and Howland point out two trees they planted the day they moved here nine years ago. They have grown into big, healthy gums, rising out of an otherwise empty paddock. It is difficult not to feel their significance.

*March 1997*

*Keith Lamb is still living in country Victoria and his friend Louise Howland is still close to him. According to Louise, 'His health is stable, he has a warm, wonderful relationship with his adult children, he paints, he studies, he sings, he writes songs.' He is, she says, 'the most kind, gentle and generous-spirited man that breathes'. In 2004, Hush reformed for a show for charity in Sydney.*

# Layne Beachley

The beach – specifically Sydney's Manly – has played a role in Layne Beachley's life that is difficult to overstate. The bliss she has derived from it, the golden childhood of endless summers, remains as vivid to her today as it was when she was a skinny little tomboy whose 13 friends were boys.

The beach, the great temple for water lovers, is even enshrined in her name. At two she was skateboarding next to it. At four she was riding broken waves on a foam board ('The ferry waves would wash me in,' she says). She was 'surfing properly' at five, happily running people over between the flags.

Even though young male territorialism in the late 1970s in Manly meant that as a girl she wasn't 'allowed' on certain parts of the beach, she would hang in the parts where she was

permitted from seven in the morning to seven at night, drinking her pink lemonade and eating salt-and-vinegar chips.

Her father, Neil, would stand up on the surf-club balcony enjoying the ritualistic Sunday afternoon barbecue the club would put on, happy with his sausage sandwich and beer, content in the knowledge that little Layne was down there on her foamie terrorising swimmers.

When the surf was flat, the boys would grab her by the ankles and the wrists and throw her over the beach wall. 'And I'd climb back up the wall and they'd do it again,' she says now. 'I was so little they loved throwing me around. I didn't mind it at all. I was getting attention.'

Now 27, Layne Beachley has all the attention she can handle. She is sitting in a Burleigh Heads cafe sipping a smoothie, her face lightly tanned, her legs a deep chocolate, the result of an enviable amount of time spent on the world's beaches.

Beachley's journey from tiny grommet to the greatest woman surfer in the world has been, to hear her tell it, relentlessly positive, drenched in love and support, an odyssey she would not change a minute of, in so many ways a quintessential eastern-seaboard Australian upbringing.

Amid all the sunlight, however, there have been shadows. Given up at birth, Layne's adoptive family was Neil and Valerie Beachley and their son, Jason, who lived just a short bus ride to the beach at Manly.

But six years later the little girl was to lose another mother. Nine hours after an operation, Valerie Beachley died from a massive cerebral haemorrhage. 'I remember Dad coming home and telling me and I put my face in my pillow and cried for a while and that was it,' Beachley says now. 'I don't think I really understood the implications of it all. I just didn't have a mother to sit on her knee and drink the dregs out of her coffee cup any more, and that was basically my only memory of her.'

Neil Beachley was an outdoors-type and doting father who used to ride his bike and tow Layne on her skateboard. He cried the first time he saw her on TV. With two small children and a job as a marketing manager who spent a lot of time away on trips, Neil Beachley called on a family friend who lived nearby, Joan Tate, to help with Layne and Jason's upbringing.

Tate ('Nan' or 'Joanie') became a mother figure, to the younger Layne at least, seeing the children off to school and being there when they got home. Sometimes when their father was on a trip, they would stay at her place.

'Joan is a wonderful, nurturing woman who was the only mothering influence I would ever accept,' Beachley says. 'I was a wretched child. I just wanted to play, to be outdoors, to be a tomboy. She let me do my thing, skateboard down the street at 100 miles per hour, or ride my bike around the block and disappear, or play tennis in the middle of the road, hit golf balls up the hill, climb trees. I was very hyperactive. If it was light, I was outside.'

Her mother's death contributed to Beachley's strong sense of independence and desire to get on with things. Instead of damaging her, it fuelled her ambition to achieve, to take on the world.

She was full of joy, but her pain had toughened her up, and she resisted affection. 'You couldn't get to her,' Tate says now. 'She wasn't a person that would run up to you and give you hugs and kisses. It took me 18 months to get to her. I'm a very cuddly, kissy person and she would sort of move away. We were shopping for her one day, buying clothes, and she came over and took my hand and that's when I knew I'd won, that's when I knew I had her.

'I went home and cried my eyes out and said to my husband, "I've got her now." She probably didn't realise what it meant to me. I felt for that little thing. She had two tragedies before the age of 10.'

But dwelling on sadness was a waste of time. Beachley was busy surfing, skating, playing tennis. 'She always had amazing balance,' says her brother, Jason (who works in the hospitality industry). 'She used to jump fully clothed on to a surfboard, plane to the other end and get out without getting wet.'

Beachley pursued her aim to be world champion with evangelical fervour. To the Manly boys this was grand talk. The boys would call her off waves just because she was a girl. 'I copped a lot of crap from guys. They were the ones that were threatened by me. They were intimidated by a girl who could actually surf better than them. Or was committed to surfing better than them.'

Brushing away the fragile egos of the boys in the surf, Beachley started to develop her taste for riding big waves, travelling away from the Manly beach breaks for meaner stuff up the coast. She attained her HSC, got several jobs in restaurants, cafes, pizza shops, surf shops and clothes shops, anything to get the money to go on the pro tour.

In the mid-'90s she became involved with the American Ken Bradshaw, 20 years her senior, arguably the world's best big-wave surfer, someone who seeks out 80-foot monsters just for fun. The relationship was to change her life. Now, in a partner, she also had a teacher, motivator and surfboard 'caddy'.

Beachley and Bradshaw became surfing's golden couple, Bradshaw using a power-ski to tow Beachley into 20-foot swells a kilometre or so out to sea, and Beachley, in turn, towing Bradshaw into nightmarish swells up to three times that size. Ken and Layne made the Six Million Dollar Man and Wonder Woman look like simpering wimps.

With Bradshaw's help, Beachley began to dominate the women's circuit, challenging the sport's illustrious crownholder, American Lisa Andersen. Then, in 1996, as a result of overtraining, over-travelling and poor diet, she developed chronic

fatigue syndrome. 'Because you're not physically debilitated, people don't sympathise with you.'

Again, her life shifted on its axis, and not even her dogged positivism could pull her through this one. 'I wasn't allowed to surf for over a month. I couldn't stay awake past eight o'clock at night, I couldn't get up before 10 in the morning. I was dog-tired. It would be a beautiful sunny day outside and all I could do was sit on the couch and watch videos, then by four in the afternoon I was in tears, suicidal, because I couldn't go surfing, couldn't go training, couldn't do anything I wanted to do. "Why can't I do this? Why am I so sick?" '

Largely recovered in 1998, and with Bradshaw urging her on, she triumphed in France, finally winning the world title. She knew she'd achieved her lifelong aim as she paddled in from her heat. 'It was announced in French that I was *champion du monde du surf*,' she says, smiling. 'I saw Ken coming down with tears in his eyes and I thought, "Wow, I've done it." '

But Bradshaw wasn't ready to let Beachley get too satisfied. 'I spent eight years getting to number one and I was almost relaxed and happy with that, until Ken came up and said, "You are the best women's surfer there is. Why can't you dominate for five years? Lisa [Andersen] won four consecutive. I'm setting you this goal: you win five world titles." So, basically, Ken sets my goals and I go out and achieve them.'

Last year she won the world title again, this time at her favourite break, Sunset Beach, Hawaii. For Beachley, it was nirvana: a 10-foot Sunset swell, just 'four girls' out and a world crown at the end of it. She knew she was at a great time of her life: at the top of her craft, idolised by freckle-faced grommets around the world, the owner of two Sydney houses and planning to buy a third, and adored by her partner and family.

And then along came a challenge on a par with any close-out set she'd encountered. In 1995, with the help of an agency,

Beachley, living on her own and lonely, had made some attempts to find out the identity of her biological mother. She accessed her original birth certificate, which revealed her mother had called her Tania.

She had just one question she needed answering: why had she been given away? Finding out her mother was a 17-year-old girl from Glasgow living in Sydney's Surry Hills went a long way to answering the question.

But the details were about to get a lot clearer. Last year Neil Beachley received a phone call that was to change all the Beachleys' lives in different ways. The call was from Layne's biological mother, Maggie, now living in Santa Rosa, California, who had tracked down Layne's father by ringing all the Sydney Beachleys.

'When she rang my Dad all she wanted to know was whether I was still living and still healthy and that I [had grown up] in a loving family,' Layne says. 'She told him the whole story; they got to know each other and he gave me her number and said, "Call her when you want."'

Neil didn't tell Maggie that her daughter was the best woman surfer in the world. But the woman's brother knew who Layne Beachley was and gave her a website to look up.

'[Neil's] been really supportive and understanding through the whole ordeal,' Beachley says. 'I was ready to call her when I felt it was the right time. She called me and tried to feed me too much information too quick, trying to get too close to me too quick and . . . I don't let too many people get too close to me, even though I'm pretty open; people have to earn my trust before I let them into my life.

'The second time she called I said, "Listen, you're trying to get too close too soon. I'm almost over it, I almost don't want to meet you." She [said] "OK." She was telling me who my dad was, the situation of it, who she is, blah, blah, blah. Then

she tried to tell me all about my sister, her youngest daughter, her five-year-old, and how she's my sister and she loves you and blah, you know. OK, I'm part of the family all of a sudden, which I don't want to be right now. It was too much too soon.'

Finally, they arranged to meet in San Francisco – 'neutral territory', as Layne says. Perhaps surprisingly, it wasn't a very emotional experience. 'I walked out, I found her, she looked very much like me, really small, petite, blue eyes . . . She gave me a quick hug, threw me in the car, drove me to the restaurant, sat me down, we drank wine, we ate, we talked, laughed, had fun, took photos, got back in the car, drove to the airport and sent me home. That was it.

'She said she desperately wanted to keep me but she really didn't have the resources to do it. She was 17, and back then abortion wasn't an [option], thank God. She had to go back to Scotland, and a single mother wasn't socially accepted, so she had to give me up.

'I think we're having difficulty communicating about it because neither of us knows how far we want to take it. She obviously would love to be able to get closer to me, but she doesn't know how to approach that, because I don't know how close I want to get to her.

'She said to me, "All I want out of this thing is that we become friends." And I said, "That's fine. That's all I want." I'm not good with mothering. I'd rather nurture than be nurtured. I don't like to have to answer to too many people. It's just the selfish, individual and independent person that I am. I don't like to be doted on. I'm not good with doting. Except with Ken.'

Beachley actually thanked Maggie 'for giving me the opportunity to live the life I had. If she hadn't given me up, I may have ended up living in Scotland or Santa Rosa. I never would have grown up being a surfer.'

Does she feel any resentment about what she's been through? 'There's not an inch of resentment. I have no problem with it because I love the way I was brought up. I loved my childhood. It created who I am, and I wouldn't change who I am for the world. Every experience I had was part of me.'

And her biological father? 'I have no wish to find my biological father because I have such a loving, devoted, wonderful father as it is. I think it's enough for him to deal with the fact that I have a biological mother and I'm sure that may intimidate him a little, but I constantly reassure him that I love him more than I would ever love any other parent that would try to parent me. Finding my mother has completed everything that I need to feel.'

Beachley also had to reassure the rest of her family that her mother's arrival in no way changes her relationship with them. 'Joan was a little jealous,' Beachley says. 'She was my mum, she was my nan, so I had to reassure her. All these people who are close to me know how I feel about them so they don't have to feel threatened or intimidated by her.'

Meanwhile, she has her career to nurture. She makes 'a great living' but doesn't want to end up with nothing once surfing's over. 'All I want to do with my money is re-invest it, so when I finish surfing I can sell off real estate and live in a really nice place.

'I'm not really materialistic. I don't really care how I dress. When I won a competition in England and won a $20,000 prize purse, I didn't go out and spend $1000 on clothes as I was encouraged to do by some of the other women. I put it in the bank and intend on redoing my kitchen.'

She is also developing her status as the world's pre-eminent female big-wave surfer. This year she honoured her vow to ride a 20-foot wave. She is, apparently, fearless.

But there is one surfing break she will probably never

revisit, Teahupo'o in Tahiti, a recently discovered wave that is regarded as the most dangerous in the world, with its jagged reef and heavy 'bowl' easily outstripping the former heavyweight Hawaii's Pipeline. The danger at Teahupo'o is that if you fall off your board, or get caught under a breaking wave, the water can suck away to reveal the dry, jagged and lethal reef.

Beachley once endured a savage wipeout there. 'The lip got me in the back of the head and threw me straight on to the reef. It was horrifying to be stuck [there]. I got cut up. That place could kill you. [It] scared the life out of me.

'I'm so comfortable in big waves when there's deep water, I'm not going to hit anything, just go down deep, and I'm very comfortable underwater, getting tossed around, like in a washing machine, I can relax very easily. I have good lung capacity, I'm prepared for it. But reefs scare me. When I'm getting scraped across reefs, I'm getting skin torn off me. I'm not good with that.'

Her trips out to sea with Bradshaw have everything a surfing boy's/girl's own manual could dream up. The couple are at the centre of surfing's new frontier, towing surfers onto swells that mere paddling would not achieve.

'Ken rides waves of up to 80 feet at Outer Log Cabins [off Hawaii]. It's hard to imagine, isn't it? Lie on your back and look up at a nine- or 10-storey building.

'In the mornings he'll prepare my equipment, make my breakfast. All I have to think about is putting on my bikini and going surfing. He plays an incredibly important, inspiring, motivating, positive role in my success, my career and my life.'

Is she ever worried about him in big surf? 'When he wants to surf 50-foot waves I don't fear for his life. I say, "Be careful and have fun." I say, "Have a nice day, enjoy those 40-foot waves out there, I'll be watching with the binoculars, I'll call

the chopper and I'll have dinner ready when you get home, sweetheart."'

She's serious. 'I cook dinner every night. I'm a very domesticated homebody. We're always in bed by nine o'clock.'

Despite a dramatic increase in aggression (usually male) out in the water (and especially in Hawaii), Beachley says more girls are taking up surfing. 'I was saying to someone in the water in Hawaii the other day – all the guys were on this side and all the girls were on that side – I said, "Isn't it that much more relaxing with just girls in the water?" There's no testosterone levels, there's nothing to prove, we can just have fun, we can goof around, we can laugh at each other. I think it's cool that women are really getting into it and are not as intimidated as we used to be.'

Beachley lives clean. 'I've never done drugs, I've never tried pot, never had a puff of a cigarette. I'm completely drug-free. I do drink red wine. I grew up surrounded by drugs, obviously in the surfing world in the '80s and '90s there were drugs. I've been in a room full of people smoking pot. I have never had any desire to indulge in any of it.'

She'd rather surf with Bradshaw. 'He is very affectionate and very emotional and good at listening.' Bradshaw has to make do with his cult status, because he earns barely a cent for his heroics. 'He's the best big-wave surfer in the world and he cannot get a sponsor,' Beachley says. 'He sells surfboards, he's got a poster [of himself on a monster wave] that he promotes and I pay him. He's my caddy. I think I win out of the deal.'

She takes her role-model status seriously. 'There was a time at Bells [Beach, in Victoria] one year when I lost a heat and I came up to the car park and I was ready to . . . grab my board and start belting it against a wall or against a pole. I was so mad, so upset. I'm so glad I didn't, I calmed myself down, I cried in the corner. Five minutes later, 10 girls came round the

corner saying, "Layne, I've been waiting for you all day to get your autograph." And I thought, "What if those girls had watched me chuck a tantrum? What kind of role model would I be if I was doing stuff like that?"'

*March 2000*

*In 2003 Layne Beachley went on to win her sixth world surfing title. She broke up with Bradshaw and her partner is now INXS saxophonist Kirk Pengilly.*

# Lyle Doniger

Two young boys are rowing a dinghy on a lake a couple of hours north of Sydney. From the shore, their grandmother is yelling out not to muck around with the oars. Further on, a father and his kids are preparing their boat to go fishing. The July sun is warm and dazzling. A couple of complaining crows whirl overhead. It's peaceful and still here, a modest retirement town with huge gum trees shading picnic tables. Most houses have a boat in their garage.

This is the place, almost the ideal version of an Australian dream, in which Lyle Doniger has temporarily found himself. He walks along here every morning from a relative's house where he is staying. He buys a newspaper and heads back, over a little wooden footbridge and down the streets where every now and again a car will mean you need to get off the road.

For the six weeks he has been back in Australia after having survived six years in a Bangkok jail, this has been a good place to rest and re-evaluate and to set up a life in which you need a Medicare card, a bank account and a driver's licence.

'Just now, after six weeks, I'm starting to get my confidence back,' Doniger says, sitting in the sun in his relative's back garden. 'It's weird. I'm a grown bloke but you still feel you have to ask to do this, ask to do that. You're not confident. A couple of days after I was back I went with my sister-in-law to buy some clothes because I had nothing. It was really strange. A few times I just couldn't handle it, I'd just take off – whoa. It was just seeing all these Western people.

'When I first got back, wherever I went I was sort of recognised, people pointing. No one was coming up and congratulating me. Friends and family are great, happy I'm back. But I don't think I have too much of the Australian public on my side.'

He's 50 now, greying and looking a little worn and anxious. He suffers from hepatitis C, acquired during a 20-year heroin addiction, has a bad back, kidney problems and a body punished by lack of food and medicines and by the occasional beating in jail. But he probably should look worse than he does. He's put on weight ('from eating up') and his face has filled out from the grim photos of him taken while in jail. He's been given a second chance at life.

'I'm starting to feel like I can do things. It's funny. You think, "If I ever got released I'll start doing this and I'll start doing that." But you're scared, I suppose. You think it's not real or something. But now I'm starting to feel, yes, it is.

'I went to the pub with my son. Everyone you meet says, "Come here, have a beer, have this." You're just looking around people feeling really weird, really strange, edgy. You can't relax. I had two beers and almost passed out. Oh, you're

a pathetic drunk! I don't drink much with the hep C. Two beers is my limit.'

Six years ago, Lyle Doniger was an ex-refrigerator mechanic on a long-term methadone program. He was on an invalid pension, the refrigeration business he had taken over from his father had gone bust, he had no money and three children from two relationships.

Doniger was approached by someone suggesting he take an all-expenses-paid trip to Thailand to pick up a small amount of heroin. Doniger was told he could keep one-third of what he brought back. Doniger had never been out of Australia. A free trip to exotic Thailand was tempting. He agreed. The trip would be taken with two Sydney women – Jane McKenzie, 29, and Deborah Spinner, 28 – who he had never met.

Doniger was living with his then-16-year-old son, Troy. They were great mates but Doniger was restless. He felt his life was slipping by without incident and would continue to. 'I'd never travelled,' he says now. 'It was my big regret in life, that I'd never been anywhere. I wasn't making any money out of the deal, just getting a bit of heroin. We're junkies. I thought, "One week in Thailand, at least it will be something I could talk about for the rest of my life."

'I had someone come in and mind Troy at night. I had cooked all these meals and frozen them, had them all labelled, in the freezer, went through it in detail. I'd even done an extra day. He didn't know I was going to Thailand, I never told anyone. He thought I was driving a truck to the Northern Territory.'

On the night before he flew to Bangkok, he went around to his two younger children's house to read them bedtime stories. 'I went down to the kids' almost every day. They were

nine and seven when I left. A real big fear of mine was that the two families would drift apart. And if siblings don't keep in contact with each other they're not siblings any more. I used to say to Troy, "Please stay in contact." He liked it, that he had the family. Every weekend he'd go and take the kids out.'

In Thailand, Doniger, McKenzie and Spinner took in some tourist sights and travelled north to the city of Pitsanulok. They met the contacts who had been set up for them, acquired the heroin and made their way back to Bangkok.

At Bangkok's Don Muang airport, as Doniger was about to board the plane back to Sydney, he felt a hand on his shoulder. The man, chief of airport security, asked if he knew McKenzie and Spinner. He said he did. Minutes later he was surrounded by about 15 police officers and security officials. In his bag they found two condoms and a packet of KY Jelly, the giveaway.

The three were X-rayed. About 350 grams of heroin was found in their bodies. Doniger was carrying three small parcels, wrapped in condoms and inserted in his bowel. He had some 34 grams, about the size of a thumb.

'We were just the couriers for somebody else,' he says now. 'The other person was also a junkie. He didn't want to carry it himself. If it was drug trafficking it would have been kilos and I wouldn't have been involved in it. I didn't really see anything wrong with it. I've been using all my life [but] I've never sold drugs in my life. So I didn't see myself as a drug dealer or a drug trafficker. I know the general public doesn't see it that way, and it's not for me to argue.'

It was a crime that might have attracted a few years in an Australian jail. In Thailand, Doniger received a death sentence for heroin trafficking, which was immediately commuted to 50 years. At the time, he told *Age* journalist Mark Baker: 'I was dead in my life before and I'm dead now. What's the difference?

The only difference is I won't see my kids grow up. I don't want to return to Australia when they are grown. I'd be a stranger, there would be no place for me then. I don't want to hurt them any more. I have done enough already.'

Back in Sydney, his son Troy was at a friend's house when he saw a report on the television about his father and the two women being arrested. He could scarcely believe it. He went home to use the phone and saw a group of reporters outside.

In Bangkok, Doniger was distraught about Troy. Who would look after him? After all, Doniger had been the primary carer. Watching the news that night was a man from St Vincent de Paul who went around to Doniger's house a few days later and helped Troy with food and rent money. He oversaw Troy for a while until Troy managed to get on his feet. 'He's a great bloke,' Doniger says now. 'I've spoken to him on the phone but haven't been able to shake his hand yet.'

In Bangkok, Doniger was trying to process what had happened to him. After the shock and the terror of the trial came the prospect of a life spent inside. During his first night on the bare floor of a cell in Klong Prem Prison, the infamous 'Bangkok Hilton', his legs were spread and shackled by a steel bar bolted to the floor, to prevent suicide. He spent the first three months in leg irons and chains.

Doniger's new reality took a while to fully sink in. 'That's the worst thing over there,' he says. 'No one ever knows when they're going to be released. It's just the unknown. A lot of people have been there 25 years now. If you're a rapist, murderer, no problem, they get out, they get all the amnesties, they have amnesties all the time: king's birthday, coronation anniversaries. But not the drug cases.'

The men with drug convictions knew they were unlikely ever to be released, so acceptance became a defence mechanism. Doniger says a complete change occurs in the 25-year

veterans, where any talk of anything outside is ruled out. 'They have really accepted it's their life; they never, ever talk about getting out,' he says. 'If you start to talk about it, they will walk away. When people first come in they sit down in a corner with their head down between their knees and they're thinking, thinking. And the Thais are saying, "Don't worry, don't worry, take it easy." If you think too much you end up [in trouble]. You just live day to day, you know, what have I got to do today, have I got to wash? Every day you look for food.'

Of all the misery and torture ahead of Doniger, going cold turkey off methadone over the first two months in jail was probably hardest to endure. 'Done', as he calls it, was better than using heroin, but, as every junkie knows, harder to get off.

'For the first two months it was really bad. I got into a food group (made up of several men who share the cooking and look out for each other against theft and attack). I was cooking on an open fire right next to a sewer line and after two months I was still having to hold on to the fence with one hand and try to stir the pot with the other hand. Couldn't stand up straight. If I did I would either faint or vomit.

'Coming off methadone is really, really hard. If you're using heroin it doesn't matter how big a habit you've got, you might be sick for a couple of weeks; coming off methadone you're sick for months.'

Slowly, Doniger got used to the squalid and dangerous conditions in jail. The Australian embassy brought him some blankets, which he sewed together to make a mattress. For most of the six years in two jails he shared a four-and-a-half-metre by eight-metre cell with 23 other men, with just enough room to lie shoulder to shoulder.

'That was very, very crowded,' he remembers. 'It doesn't worry the Thais that much. If you've got that same room and

you put four Thais in it, they'd all sleep in one corner. If you had four Westerners, they'd be one in each corner; keep your distance, that's the way it is.

'The Thais like to get together. They think it's nice to sleep with their arms over each other. With Western people, that's just not on. You're shoulder to shoulder. Every night, 10 times a night, I'd pick someone's leg up and throw it off me.'

The $300 or so the Australian Embassy would 'loan' him for food arrived every three months. The money meant he would not have to be subjected to the virtually inedible 'rice gruel' the prison supplied. Instead, he could buy small amounts of meat and some vegetables, available both from the guards and other prisoners. 'I was there six years and never ate [the gruel],' he says. 'When times were really bad you had to wash it to get the dirt out of it, even after it's cooked. It's all the scraps.

'You can't eat too much because wherever you were in the building you are never less than 40 feet from an open sewer. So whatever you smell and what you're eating it has the same taste. Even if you're eating really good food, you're smelling shit everywhere.

'I never used to boil the water, which a lot of people did. Someone said, "Put up with being sick for a while and you eventually get used to it." Sure, I could drink raw sewage now and I wouldn't get sick.'

He could get by on the embassy money as long as nothing else went wrong. Prisoners were expected to pay for everything, including prison repairs. 'If a light globe goes in the room, prisoners have to pay,' he says. His food money was spent on meat, although depending on where he was in the jail hierarchy, often Doniger was forced to buy from 'bags of rotting chicken, real crap'. 'Meat is very expensive. My sister would send me over a food parcel twice a year. My son would

come over and bring packets of Deb instant mash potatoes. I was able to get a stack of them in my locker.'

Days began at 6.30 a.m. and prisoners were locked down at 4 p.m. Foreigners were not expected to work, so most days were spent organising food. 'Getting food wasn't easy. You had to find out who had what to sell. Someone might have carrots. You'd say to someone, "I know you've got some onions in your locker." Everybody had a little business specialising in one thing or another.'

To clean, river water would be pumped in. 'Jeez, it used to stink. It would be pumped into a big long trough and you get a scoop and pour it over yourself. It would be a different colour every day, depending on what had happened. If it had rained upriver somewhere the water would come out real muddy. So when you dried yourself you could brush the dust off. Other times the water would be really green with all these river worms in it. In each scoop there'd be a thousand of these worms. If you had longer hair, next morning you'd stink like a dead animal.'

Doniger managed to survive the violence around him, largely because the Thai guards were careful to protect foreigners. In his first year, though, Doniger had given up. 'You realise that your life is sort of finished. There were a lot of suicides at that place. Most people when they committed suicide just stopped eating. Nobody cares. It would be a rare week that I didn't see somebody dead.'

When Doniger became ill with a kidney complaint, he would ask a certain guard to get antibiotics for him, for a price. One day, the guard was off duty, so Doniger asked a different guard. The guard charged him three times the usual price, which wiped out money for food for the next month. 'I spent the next month going around begging people for food,' he says.

Mail from Australia could take up to a month to get to the prisoners, but sometimes the guards did not bother passing it on and just threw it away.

He remembers the attempts at extortion at Bang Kwang, Bangkok's maximum-security prison for hardened criminals. 'Bang Kwang was the top jail, it was a promotion to get to that jail for the guards. There were a lot of big-time dealers in that jail and the guards were after the money (for extra services like going to buy medicinal drugs and extra food). Some were good guards. They didn't try and extort money. But they needed another income, so some of them had little shops. One guard would come in every morning with a trolley and scales selling these Thai vegetables, proper apron and change.'

Doniger tried to improve conditions in his cell, which the other prisoners chipped in to pay for. 'The bathroom was a big hole, a squat toilet. Every night rats would come up. And people were screaming and chasing the rats around, getting bitten. I did the room up. The Thais couldn't understand that. We had the whole toilet area ripped out, a new toilet put in, tiles put around, shower screen.

'We had Masonite put on the roof to stop the maggots falling down. Every night the maggots used to fall down on you. There were thousands of pigeons in the roof and the rats would get up there and kill the pigeons and what they didn't eat the maggots would get on, so every time the wind would blow all this bird shit and feathers would come down with the maggots.

'Quite often you'd wake up and there'd be maggots on your pillow and they'd be stuck to your face or in your hair and you'd be breathing in the bird shit, which had turned to dust, which was dangerous. There was always at least two people sick of the 23. I'm talking really sick. After we put the ceiling up, almost instantly there was no one sick in the room. They

thought it was Buddha being good to this room. But the other Thais got the guards to put the Masonite up in other rooms.

'They had done about one-third of it when the guards realised that, "Crikey, no one's getting sick, no one's dying". So they stopped. People have got to die to allow space for more to come in. So, then it was a real black-market thing, guards sneaking Masonite in.'

Doniger feared that the longer he spent in jail, the more he would lose track of civilisation and of his own mind. 'Lucky I'm pretty low-strung with a bad memory. I try to block things out. I developed an art of that, trying to think of something else. When I was there, I had nightmares all the time.

'Most foreigners just change after about eight years. They start chasing the *katoys* (transvestites), which a lot do, or they become junkies, even if they had never used, even if they'd held out for years, they think, "Why not?" Or they go absolutely crazy.'

Doniger knew that while prisoners had been pardoned by the king, those convicted of drug offences almost never received pardons. The much-talked-about prisoner-exchange program between Australia and Thailand, in which Doniger might have been transferred to a Sydney prison, moved too slowly to help him. He often contemplated suicide, but thoughts of his children always stopped him.

'I've known people years ago in Australia who have killed themselves and I've known how their family, their kids, were just absolutely devastated. Kids think, "Maybe it was something I did wrong." If I didn't have kids I would have done it, for sure. I didn't want to put them through any more.

'I kept under my bed a Stanley knife blade. One time I was going to do it, I sharpened it up and I didn't do it. I kept it there as a mind game: I can keep this here and not do it, sort of thing. It would have been stupid. I might have been pardoned the next week.'

The hardest periods of the six years was dealing with his son, Troy, leaving after his once-a-year visit. 'My son used to come out each year. All year for months and months you'd be looking forward to this, you know, it'd keep you alive; you'd be planning things, writing down what you're going to talk about because your contact period is very limited: two one-hour visits.

'Every time I'd have my list, but when you get there you don't talk. You just sit there and hug each other. And an hour's gone. It seems like you'd just met and the guards are pulling you apart. Some foreigners would not let their families come because they know the emotional stress they go through afterwards.'

In May this year, Doniger received a pardon from the king. The reasons are still unclear, and the embassy was unable to explain. His release was as bizarre as anything else he'd endured. 'It was Friday night, we'd been locked down,' Doniger remembers. 'An hour later there were a whole lot of guards coming in. They came to my cell, opened it up and pointed to me and said, "You." They asked for a strip search.

'Then they tried pulling me out of the room. They didn't tell me I'd been pardoned. I didn't want to leave the room. I thought, "If they're going to kill me, at least kill me in here." They can't really beat white people up in front of other people. They get into trouble for it.

'A little scuffle started out between the guard and me and then his face got really red because he didn't think I'd react like this. So he said, "You're going home." In Thai I called him a liar. It was the last thing on my mind. I'd given up on the pardon. Almost a year before we were told that anyone with a drug conviction of more than 25 years, you can't get a full pardon. At best you could get a cut in your sentence. And a cut in your sentence, I didn't care. I was on 50 years. What

difference does it make if they cut it down to 40 years or even 30 years?

'I went into shock. I just couldn't believe it. They just wanted me out of the prison really quick, take me out as I was. Just out. I was thinking, "Crikey, I've got to take something, a change of clothes, photos of the kids, letters." For years I'd wanted a good fan because it gets so hot in this place. I'd had some money sent over and I'd bought this fan one week before. The guard said, "You give I, you give I." I didn't want to give it to him. I didn't even like this guard. I said in Thai, "You give me three minutes and I'll give you the fan."

' "OK."

'He orders the other guy to back off for three minutes. So I'm ripping stuff out of the lockers trying to get photos and letters. Got most of my photos. My brain is just spinning around at a million miles an hour.'

During his first night of freedom at a police station, Doniger was suspicious it might be a mirage. 'That first 24 hours I couldn't lie down, I was just buzzing, my head didn't stop spinning. All you're thinking is that at any moment they're going to realise it was a mistake and they're going to come back and say, "Sorry, sorry, sorry, it should have been Joe Brown," and back you go. At that point I wouldn't let myself believe it. I couldn't. If that had happened, you'd kill yourself. I'm just looking at the clock, looking at the clock.'

It was when he finally boarded a Thai Airways flight to Sydney that he knew he was free. 'I was just grinning like a Cheshire cat. They were walking around with the meals trolley and they came up and were rattling off the list and I said, "Anything at all, as long as it doesn't have rice." '

In Sydney, he spoke to some of his family, gave a few quotes to the waiting media and then walked outside and felt the cold Sydney air on his face. He had always hated the heat of Bangkok.

'All I wanted to do was get out of the airport and see the place. Just look at the sky. When I walked out and felt the cold air, that was unbelievable. I didn't even have a pair of long pants. Somebody had brought me a jacket. It was a cold day and you could see the sky. In Bangkok you look up and see the smog.'

It's now time to rebuild his life. He's got his family around him, supporting what Doniger calls 'the black sheep'. In the kitchen, Doniger's sister-in-law is making him an Irish stew. A pile of cut-up meat is on a board. 'That would have been enough meat to last me a month,' he says.

He is looking forward to travelling with son Troy to Melbourne to meet his younger children, now aged 13 and 15. His second wife has remarried and moved south. Doniger wants to take the kids to Luna Park. There's a long road ahead, he believes, in winning their trust again. 'It took me a week before I could ring them up. I worked up the courage one night and it was good, they still want to know me. I really had to keep joking about things, because I really didn't want to get emotional talking to them.'

Troy, to whom he has always been close, is now 23 and a butcher. Doniger is proud of how he's turned out. 'I left him by himself. A week became six years.'

Doniger's quest now is to help McKenzie and Spinner out of jail. He had occasional contact with them in Thailand when they would talk in court. 'I had it pretty bad, but I reckon they got it worse than I did. I had 23 to a room. They've got 90 to a room.

'I'm going to help them get a plea for a pardon. With me here I can fast-track that. If the Australian Government really wants to they can really push the Thais. I think the Thais will pay attention because I'm out.'

Doniger said that without public pressure, their chances of a pardon or release were slim. 'Unless I really get in and do

something, not much chance at all. I can make a big difference. They've only got their mothers here and they are really too elderly to be able to do much.

'They've both got kids. Jane had a baby not long before she got arrested. The problem is her mother, who originally took the kids, is now quite elderly. The kids are now in foster homes and after a certain amount of time, if the mother and child are separated you don't get them back. [Jane's] going through a real bad time thinking this time is getting near.'

He is wrestling with ideas about his future. 'Can't go back into refrigeration. Working with the gas made me really sick. That's my only trade.'

Does he worry? 'Oh yeah. What can I do? With hep C you go through one week a month of chronic tiredness. It would make it pretty hard to work. At the prison they knew about it, and they'd give me a pretty wide berth. I used to just crash on the floor behind my locker.'

He'd like to travel around Australia in a camper van he plans to buy with money his beloved father left him when he died, when Doniger was in jail. He says he is amazed at the cost of living. So he will try to live in his camper van. What he is certain to do is drive to Canberra to lobby politicians on behalf of McKenzie and Spinner. Helping to secure their freedom is one of his main concerns.

The overwhelming impression of Doniger is of a man who'd lost track of his life and done something stupid. He wants a second chance to be a good father. He wants to make up for past mistakes. As the water of the lake sparkles in the sunshine near us, Doniger is ready to start again. 'When I first got on the plane you're almost in shock, you're that excited. Then I was worried for six weeks. I'm coming out of it now. I'm thinking a lot clearer now.'

*July 2002*

*Since this interview, Lyle Doniger has struggled to readjust to a free life. He lives in a van, which at night he parks under bridges or in supermarket car parks. He exists on a pension and regularly sees a psychiatrist. Of his time back in Australia, Doniger says: 'I've had good times and bad times.'*

*In 2004, Jane McKenzie and Deborah Spinner arrived back in Australia after serving seven years in Bangkok's Klong Prem women's prison. They were sentenced to 50 years in a Thai jail in 1997 after being caught trying to smuggle 115 grams of heroin to Australia from Bangkok. They were returned under the International Transfer of Prisoners Scheme. They were to serve another five years of their original sentence before being eligible for parole.*

# Neil Finn

Three months ago, Neil Finn was preparing to celebrate the 10th anniversary of his band, Crowded House. It should have been a happy time: releasing a greatest hits collection, enjoying his new life back home in Auckland, content in the knowledge that his band had respect, hefty album sales and carte blanche to play around the world in front of large audiences.

But celebrations weren't really on his mind. The man most agree is one of the greatest songwriters to have emerged from Australasia (Finn is a New Zealander who lived in Melbourne most of his adult life) felt trapped, unchallenged and restless.

As he tinkered in his downstairs music room having 'a big listen' to his last six months' worth of ideas, Finn was troubled by a feeling that he'd come to the end of a stage in his life and

that it was time to embark on another. The whispers of his instincts had turned into a roar.

'I suddenly realised it didn't sound like Crowded House to me,' Finn says. 'And I thought, "I don't need to continue with Crowded House; I can do this any way I want," and at that point a lightness descended. Not to paint too dramatic a picture, but there was a moment of revelation to some extent and afterwards a big smile appeared on my face and I went upstairs like a grinning fool and told my wife, Sharon, that I was going to leave the band, call it what you will, break the band up.'

Crowded House was finished, and with it ended a glorious chapter in Australian popular music. The band released just four albums, but it is a body of work that towers over so much else from the past decade. Finn had a talent for producing at will songs that other writers would open a vein for: 'Something So Strong', 'Into Temptation', 'Four Seasons In One Day', 'Nails In Your Feet', 'Together Alone'.

But most confounding to his peers was that the songs seemed simple. As much as Finn has always grimaced at his work being compared with The Beatles, he must have often felt the way Paul McCartney did when he wrote 'Yesterday': that it was so good someone else must have already written it.

But the songs were, as was the band itself, assuredly Finn's.

Crowded House was Neil Finn's vision, his vehicle and, in the end, an anvil tied to his feet. Crowded House had started as an uncomplicated rock outfit giving expression to the ideas in Finn's head.

From the outside it looked like the band everyone wanted to be in, one that had successfully tip-toed along that fault-line between commercial success and critical acclaim. Its members were rich, they were admired and, it certainly seemed to those of us watching, they were happy. How could they not be?

But, of course, it wasn't as simple as that. Behind the easy-going image they presented to the world, the realities of keeping Crowded House on the road for a decade started to send stress fractures through the band.

'I didn't feel like I was getting enough out of it creatively to justify making the personal compromises that being in a band entails,' Finn says now. 'It's like a restrictive thing for me, the sound of Crowded House; although I appreciate it and it'd taken me a lot of places that I really enjoyed, it was a bit repetitive for me. I didn't want to continue along that vein knowing that eventually we'd become a shadow of what we'd been.

'I've been in a band for 20 years and I've given myself pretty totally to both bands I was in. They have been the dominant factor in deciding my schedule, my lifestyle . . . And although I've had a fair amount of control over what Crowded House has done, I've still been deferring to the wishes of the group in my decision-making.

'At this point in my life, that kind of shared collective is, I think, a young man's kind of thing. There's only been the oddest of occasions where bands have made that transition into middle age in a dignified way. I think it's because of that group or gang mentality I became less interested in it all.'

Originally called the Mullanes (after Finn's middle name), Finn started Crowded House in 1986 as a follow-up to his successful career in Split Enz. He recruited Enz drummer Paul Hester and, after bass guitarist Nick Seymour, the brother of Hunters and Collectors mainman Mark Seymour, approached Finn at the Tropicana nightclub in Richmond to offer his services, he was in too. This was, finally, the younger Finn's chance to conquer the world.

Which did not take long. Their third single, 'Don't Dream It's Over', stopped at number two on the US charts, and the

first self-titled album followed it up, reaching number five in the US. They chatted to Jane Pauley on the *Today* show, played to 85,000 in Germany and secured their status as a super-group. 'There have been,' Finn says now, 'numerous, critical gigs where I've come off thinking we were the best band in the world.'

But there were ripples on the golden pond. As Crowded House got bigger, the pressure on Finn intensified. His time away from his two sons in New Zealand (the Finns moved back to their native Auckland last year) increased, the pressure to keep a large crew employed was ever-present and the joy of being in a band dissipating.

'There is inevitably around every band a machinery that builds up around it, not just the other guys in the band but crews, management, everyone relying [on you] and waiting for you to give the nod and say, "OK, I've got a bunch of songs; let's go record," or, "OK, let's go tour,"' Finn says. 'That's a burden. It may be the same without a band. I'm about to find out.'

Finn held the reins of Crowded House so tightly – song-writing, producing, arranging and singing – that his dominance became a political issue within the group. He now says he would have appreciated help, but his authority had created a cone of silence. No man is an island, but in Crowded House, Neil Finn came very close.

'The others would probably argue I wasn't allowing them to,' Finn says, 'but nevertheless I felt I was doing most of the work and yet then still having to defer to everybody's wishes when it came to making decisions and putting up with bad tempers – particularly from Paul – bad humour and blackness; that influence on my life I was not enjoying. All those aspects of being in a band, the compromises you have to make, it just wasn't in sync with the way I was feeling.'

Drummer Paul Hester, who left the group just before a show in Atlanta in April 1994 and now lives in Melbourne, concedes the 'bad humour and blackness' of which Finn speaks stemmed from a desire to return to some sort of normality. Business decisions had become as important as creative ones, and life on the road began to lose its allure.

'The blackness was a huge factor for the boys to overcome,' Hester says. 'It was there and I was very much responsible for it . . . It's hard for the band to cop that every day. I was like a frustrated two-year-old unable to express myself. I didn't know how to tell them my heart wasn't in it.'

Hester's departure was a heavy blow for Crowded House. If Finn was the creative core, Hester embodied the band's spirit. His jovial presence in the band was a counterpoint to Finn's darker proclivities. Rarely do drummers have high profiles, but Hester impressed America and Europe with his witty stage banter, a charm that Finn admired and the band used as a selling point.

'The mix of personalities is what makes a band sing, like a club that you want to join, a gang you want to be in,' Finn says. 'A good band has that sense of putting out a shared aesthetic and everyone looks at it and it looks attractive, inviting, seductive almost. That was the case throughout on stage. Towards the end, when Paul was getting dark on it, we certainly lost some pizzazz on stage, we weren't putting out the same amount of energy.

'[Paul's leaving] put me into a mindset where I was confronting my reasons for wanting to have a band or continuing. And not because we couldn't have continued without Paul, we quite clearly could have got another drummer and made a very worthy record.

'It would have been different on stage, and I had to decide, "Are we a band or are we just a name?" If we're just a name

I can call it Crowded House and pull in anyone who happens to be around. I do happen to believe that at our best we were a band and it was a combination of individuals, and the character of the band was defined by those individuals. I recognised that when Paul left, we lost a part of what people knew us as.'

Did he understand Hester's decision? 'I did in a way; I understood in as much as I understand him. Part of me would have loved to have escaped as well. There are times on the road where you just want to throw your hands up and go, "I've had enough, this is all madness, I just want it to stop and go home." I've never had the luxury of being able to [just leave].

'Paul [leaving] was a severe hiccup and quite a traumatic time trying to work out what to do, [but] we were able to continue. He had the luxury of being able to throw his hands up and go. And in that sense I understood it and I was envious. I would have loved to have jumped on the same plane and gone home too. But the stubbornness . . . at that point we'd invested a lot of energy and a lot of emotion into [the band] and I didn't want to turn and run – I had more loyalty to it than that.'

Finn wrote all the band's songs, except the one song per album Paul Hester would contribute. Nick Seymour, while doing the band's artwork, was not a writer.

'I started to look at bands and I saw the ones that survived for long periods of time and seem to have been able to redefine themselves generally had a creative core of two main writers at least, where the friction, the bounce between those two people is what makes the music evolve and keep changing and being exciting,' Finn says. 'I wasn't getting that kind of stimulation or inspiration from another very strong creative musical partner in the group.

'It sounds like I'm putting s— on the amount of work the guys did – they played what they played really well and we

made a good sound together – but whether it was because I wasn't allowing enough to let them in or whether it was because they were too lazy to really make the effort . . .'

The criticism sounds scathing, but Hester agrees Finn's burden was too great. 'Neil had to keep a lot of people in work, which wasn't your idea about forming a band,' he says. 'From a creative thing it turned into a business thing, and the business side kept Neil engaged a lot more than the artistic side.'

It was difficult, too, to contribute songs. 'Up against a bunch of Neil's songs, there was always a pretty stringent process to go through to get my songs up,' Hester says. 'I always enjoyed a little bit of popularity. I had a bit of a Ringo thing going there. Someone would always make a point of saying, "Oh, I liked your song too." So that was nice. I remember people asking Ringo Starr about songwriting and he'd say, "What am I going to do, I'm in a band with Lennon and McCartney?" '

It is 20 years since Tim Finn invited his baby-faced 19-year-old hospital orderly younger brother to join Split Enz. It was an inspired piece of recruiting. The younger Finn soon wrote 'I Got You', which became the band's biggest hit and a turning point for them as they struggled against the tide of punk rock. Neil Finn's songs started to slightly overshadow his brother's, and a fascinating competition ensued to see who would produce the best work.

The Finns had the most important weapon a great band needed: each other. In Crowded House, Neil Finn felt alone, and his dominance was seen as an inability to let anyone else lift a finger.

'We coined the phrase two dorks and a dictator as a joke, but it became stuck for a while,' Finn says. 'A very bad thing to say. We all laughed about it. They saw me, I think at times,

as being a bit of an intimidating presence, and I wanted to get things my own way, but that was only because I wrote the songs I wanted . . . and to some extent those guys were on a pretty good wicket.

'They may have their own spin on this, but it was a pretty good run. They'd turn up to the studio, there'd be a whole bunch of songs written for them, they'd get a lot of directions, between [producer] Mitchell [Froom] and myself in terms of what might work in the arrangement, they'd get to work for a couple of weeks on 11 tracks, then muck around for four or five weeks in the studio. We were living in LA, they'd be off having long coffees and breakfasts and [in] bookshops and clubs and cafes, you know.

'So to some extent I felt quite justified in at times putting my foot down and saying, "This is the way it has to be," because I was in the studio all the time and making the phone calls and making the rehearsal tapes and going home and editing them up and turning up the next day with the edited tapes.'

Paul Hester says Finn's comments are fair. 'Neil's approach to songwriting has always been pretty much on his own,' Hester says in response. 'He would come along to rehearsals sometimes with quite completed ideas, sometimes with fragments. We'd jam and knock up the feel or some of the parts. There wasn't any real drive for me and Nick to write songs with Neil. We were, as I understood it, quite happy to have Neil come along with his stuff and us working on it.'

Neil Finn is 38 and a committed family man. He has been married, to Sharon, for 15 years. Their two sons, Liam and Elroy, are 12 and six. He is an intense man who is hard to get to know, famous for eschewing the rock'n'roll life. Sometimes he gives the impression that he wouldn't have minded letting his hair down a little more than he did, instead of wandering back to his hotel room to write a new song.

'I've really enjoyed travelling and moving around the world, but you're a bit of a bystander, a bit of a spectator in a lot of ways, unless you're Nick Seymour, who is able to participate almost everywhere he goes,' Finn says. 'For me, I find I've become a bit detached.'

Finn sometimes looked uncomfortable among all the mirth of Crowded House. He wasn't naturally frivolous. There always seemed to be something else on his mind. The intensity was at once his best asset and a shield that often meant he couldn't stop and smell the roses.

'Life's intense for me and I think it is for most people. I'm not frivolous, but I've got a sense of humour about things and so I think my anxiety about things is certainly balanced with a lot of good humour and a lot of good times. I'm anxious about my work, and it being really good . . . I take it very seriously, sometimes perhaps too seriously, so maybe people misinterpret that slightly over-pedantic or perfectionist quality as being anxious.'

Finn still plans to make music, but he has not decided with whom. He has telephoned a couple of producers he may work with. He is also yet to decide whether his new venture will be as a band or a solo act.

'[Being in a band] doesn't seem like a very appropriate way to head into the middle of your life. And I've got two kids who I want to give some of my best years to in terms of seeing them through adolescence and all that, and if you're in a band in the way I've been in bands for 20 years, it becomes very difficult.'

It is a period of exhilaration, freedom and relief. 'If we'd gone on another few years, who knows, we might not have ended up as mates, and I think we are still,' Finn says. 'There's a lot of affection.

'[Nick] was disappointed and didn't think it was a good idea.

He attributes it to me wanting to spend time with my family. I think he's got a slightly odd spin on it. But nevertheless he accepts it and knows me well enough to know it was a considered decision. There's a degree of anger in there that he hasn't been able to express to me.'

Finn wants to make 'very experimental' music. 'I would feel like I haven't achieved anything if I broke the band up and didn't venture into unknown territory. I really want to push the barriers back a bit, find out what I'm capable of . . .'

Finn wants to let other aspects of his life 'grow'. 'When you're in a band you don't get into a sense of community very much because you're not in a community for very long. Having moved back to New Zealand, I'd like to hunker down here a little bit and get in touch with some of my old memories. Not that I want to just go back and recapture my lost youth. But I have a strong connection to the place. I'd like to make deeper connections with the people around me.'

Moving home to New Zealand was, he says, the right thing to have done, although he and Sharon have had mixed feelings about it. The Finns are disappointed by the smallness of New Zealand and the 'lack of a lot happening'. 'There's quite a degree of negativity in New Zealand, people willing to be critical out of a small-mindedness, a mean-spiritedness. Not to say everybody's like that, but it does exist here. There's a kind of aspiration the country has towards Britishness that I don't like still. That's still alive here, more so than in Australia, which seems to have shaken off a lot of that. Then, New Zealand has the landscape and the light [and there] is a really good earthiness about the way people live here to balance it up.'

Finn is uneasy that there are already two biographies on him. A new one, by a New Zealand writer, is in train, which, in the interest of accuracy, Finn is co-operating with. 'It seems

to me I'm still in the middle of it, so what would you want to write about?' he says. 'It's funny reading about your life. You don't want to become a museum piece before you're even 40.'

Finn will spend the next few weeks planning his future. '[In bands] you tend to get a bit over-obsessed with analysing yourself, and you have moments of revelation where you're lying on a beach, the classic looking at stars, and you think, "This really doesn't matter a shit, this is just a band." So if I gave up writing songs tomorrow, it wouldn't affect much at all. But there's something in me that refuses to do that.'

*August 1996*

*After Crowded House broke up, Neil Finn was involved in various musical projects, including two solo albums,* Try Whistling This *and* One Nil, *and an album with his brother, Tim, called* Everyone is Here, *released in September 2004. Neil Finn became famous and did some of his best work in Australia, so, for the purposes of this collection, he is an honorary Australian.*

# Mark Occhilupo

Saturday afternoon in the bowels of the Crown Casino. Massive TV screens broadcast horse racing and a rugby match to a boisterous, braying and, in some cases, well-lubricated crowd. The mysterious and ethereal charms of riding waves are a world away.

Mark Occhilupo – who just two weeks ago on a beach in Brazil became Australia's latest and, at 33, the sport's oldest world champion – is flicking through a little clutch of betting slips for the WS Cox Plate, just a small flutter for a first-time punter.

A group of seasoned track followers, four form-guide-toting men in hip-hugging jeans, sit at a nearby table. Down here there's not much they won't bet on. 'Excuse me, Mr Occhilupo,' says one. 'How many world titles have you won?'

'Just one,' confirms Occhilupo, incongruous here in his long board shorts, fleece and sandles. 'This was my first.'

'Thank you.' The man turns to his companions triumphantly and begins to settle the debt.

It would have taken the bravest and most visionary of punters to place any hard-earned on Mark Occhilupo (or 'Occy' as he is universally known) returning from eight years of self-imposed exile to ascend to the height of his sport.

He is one of modern surfing's greatest stories and, if surfing were taken seriously around the world in the mainstream press, one of the most astonishing stories in sport.

There have been greater successes – in Australia, Newcastle's Mark Richards won the world title four times, from 1979–82. And there have been arguably greater surfers. Florida's Kelly Slater is spoken of as the best the world has seen, a fearless power surfer of breathtakingly nonchalant athleticism who dominated his sport so comprehensively that, when at the height of his powers, he chose to take this year off, a huge shadow that hung over every surfing competition in which he participated was lifted.

But Occy's story is a human story, a story of dazzling success at 16, then burn-out just a year or so out of his teens, then a sad devolution into huge weight problems, associated anxiety attacks about being seen in public, and a motivation level towards surfing hovering around zero.

He now calls this long period his 'Elvis years' or his time 'on the couch'. Indeed, the Elvis parallel is instructive. It has been customary to look to rock'n'roll for such staggering declines. But in the past two years, Occy's story has become one of redemption: an honouring of a promise he made to himself and to his wife, Beatrice, and 17-year-old stepson, Raynor, that only he and his close circle would take seriously.

'Most sporting comebacks end in total failure, with the guy

walking off with his head between his legs,' says Mark Richards. 'To go from being regarded as one of the best surfers in the world to what is obviously a major crisis, then to come back and belt guys 10 years younger is amazing.'

'It's been a conquest of the human spirit,' says former Australian world surf champion Wayne 'Rabbit' Bartholomew. 'Ordinary people will hear about this through word of mouth because it's a legendary thing.'

What chance did he give his friend of coming back? 'I gave him zero chance,' Bartholomew says. 'Absolutely zero. And that's heavy for me to say that.'

Marco Luciano Jay Occhilupo (the name in Italian roughly means 'eye of the wolf') was born in 1966, the youngest and only boy in a family of three adoring sisters (who have gone on to become a lawyer, a doctor and a composer). His father, Luciano, had migrated from Italy to Australia in 1953 and married Pam Raphael, a New Zealander. Unlike his rambunctious son, Luciano Occhilupo was a scholarly man who studied engineering part-time at university over a 16-year period.

He wanted his son to become an academic. Surfing was not a part of the Italian culture and, despite the family's proximity to excellent waves, it was regarded by Luciano as a fun hobby but certainly no career.

But young Mark began to show a facility for riding waves. Ripping, sliding, carving, putting his board at astonishing angles, Occy was so hot he attracted the attention of Gordon Merchant of surfwear company Billabong, who slung the boy a pair of shorts. Soon, aged 13, he won a local competition and, with it, a sponsor. As it turned out, Merchant was to become an adviser and father figure for the next 20 years, and his company a financial lifeline for Occy.

Cronulla is an industrial suburb in Sydney's south, made

famous by the rites-of-passage novel *Puberty Blues*. It is now better known for the exclusive Surfers Paradise-style apartments and cafes that dot its shoreline, but once, if you managed to avoid eating rocks after coming off your board, you had to avoid the regular dust-ups on shore.

'It used to be the westies or rev heads fighting the surfers, and the surfers fighting the clubbies, and sometimes the surfers fighting the surfers in the pub on Saturday night,' remembers former Cronulla local Jon Frank, now one of Australia's pre-eminent surfing photographers.

The nearby Kurnell Peninsula had a series of powerful and dangerous reef breaks and some beach breaks. 'There's a left at Kurnell on a reef break which is very heavy,' Frank says. 'A guy drowned there once while surfing. When you grow up surfing the reef breaks around Cronulla you learn how to handle the power.'

Handling powerful waves was never Occy's problem. Even at 15 and 16, he was built like the proverbial brick outhouse. His chunky legs, low centre of gravity, God-given skill on a wave, and a seemingly complete innocence of the concept of fear forged his reputation. '. . . I went down to Cronulla and saw this kid surfing,' remembers Rabbit Bartholomew in the video *The Occumentary*. 'He looked like a normal grommet but there was something about him. I knew the kid could be more than something special; he might be just like nothing ever before.'

And he looked the part. Occy was the identikit surf grommet: the famously luxuriant salt-white hair, the ever-present insouciant grin, the bee-stung lips, the pronounced jawline. In those years he wore a look of unfettered joy mixed with a trace of bewilderment that he was being paid to do what he lived for anyway.

When he quit a construction job after two days and told

his father he wanted to surf for a living, Luciano was unimpressed. Occy decided to leave home.

'He didn't know what surfing was to the extent of having a career out of it,' Occy says now. 'But after I started winning contests and making a living out of it, he was fine. He loved it, and he was really proud.'

Aged 16, against the advice of his mentor, Gordon Merchant, and without the blessing of his father, Occy was on the world tour. In just his second year, he was competing at Pipeline in Hawaii, one of the world's most brutal waves. He came second. Occy placed 16th in his rookie season and in the three subsequent years he was ranked third, fourth and third again.

But after three years of frustration at watching guys win with little 'tricks' that in the 1980s and early '90s scored well with the judges, the crash-and-burn technique of the 'Raging Bull', as thrilling as it was to surfing purists, wasn't getting him across the line.

It didn't help, either, that he was missing victory by a point here, a point there. The will began to drain out of him. He started to lose his focus. From ninth place in 1987, he slipped to 48th. (In 1994 his ranking sank as low as 490.)

Then, in 1988, he disappeared. He went home, abandoned the tour, abandoned the surf, took to the Gold Coast party scene and serious eating and drinking. He reportedly went for days between showers, and avoided visitors and cameras (which explains the lack of photographic evidence of Occy's dark years). It was over.

Occy talked about wanting to 'live like normal people live, do some labouring work or something and go to the footy'. He would be remembered, it seemed, as a gifted wild child, a wide-eyed, much-loved prodigy, the textbook 'coodabeen', the 'permanent boy', as writer Nick Carroll has called him.

The man-child who never quite had the steel to match the expectations the surfing world had of him, and he of himself.

'He went on the circuit too young,' says Gordon Merchant. 'As much as I advised him not to, he insisted. By 19 or 20 he was burnt out.' The idea of pacing himself was anathema to someone whose only speed was full-throttle.

Occy was magnificent in the water but chaotic out of it. He was absent-minded, accident-prone and as clumsy on land as he was balanced in the sea. In an incident friends say was an omen of the confusing years ahead, Occy once buried his boards on a beach in France during a contest and discovered next morning a litter-trawling tractor had crushed them to fibreglass splinters.

'He's not a competitive person,' his sister, Fleur, told the *Sun-Herald* in 1990. 'He's not ruthless that way.'

'The very nature of the sport is that it is ruthless,' says Rabbit, who was also a wild, full-stretch character on the pro circuit in the '70s and '80s. 'As an athlete it is very self-centred. You've got to believe you're number one. Occy was very different to that. In his surfing he had the belief. But not in other areas. He's a free spirit with amazing talent, but he couldn't put together a 12-month campaign.'

The stories about Occy's decline trickled out. He had squandered a fortune, he was sleeping 18 hours a day, waking up to watch daytime television, and gorging on chicken and chips. His weight over five years had ballooned from 75 to 111 kilograms (by comparison, Tony Lockett, several inches taller than Occy, at his heaviest was 110kg). Once a ball of sinews and muscle, Occy now went out only when he knew he wouldn't be recognised.

'I was drinking a few beers every night . . . or maybe a six-pack every night, and eating chips or chicken and chips and just lazing about on the couch,' he says. 'I did get really big

and I was embarrassed and I was having anxiety attacks about going outside because I was worried about someone saying, "There's Occy," and laughing, going "Look how fat he is!" And it was true. It was kind of pretty funny.

'Actually, it wasn't funny at all, but it would look funny to some surf people. If someone was happily fat, that's OK and maybe that could be funny. But I was trying to run away from my talent and what I love to do.'

'I didn't know whether he'd come out of it or not,' wife Bea told *The Occumentary*, 'or whether he'd stay fat forever.'

The years drifted on. Occy was spoken of sadly, rarely seen, his great teen triumphs fading memories. Despite stories that he didn't surf for six months at a time, the truth, he says now, is that he would squeeze himself into a wetsuit and go to a surf break where he knew he would be alone. 'I lived on the beach for those periods and I used to sneak down and have a little surf,' he says. 'I couldn't stop it altogether. Not really surfing, just paddling out there feeling the ocean going over me. It's really an addictive thing. I needed to do it. No matter how fat I was I still sneaked down and had a surf because I needed to so much.'

In 1994, Occy was near the nadir of his reclusive existence. His father had died four years earlier of a brain tumour. Despite their differences, Occy and his father had shared a great love. Some say it was Luciano's death that kept Occy in the shadows.

Rabbit remembers his attempt – with Gordon Merchant – (a 'battle plan' he calls it) at getting Occy out of the house and back surfing. He organised for Occy to surf in an exhibition at Bells Beach on Victoria's West Coast, the sort of thick, substantial wave Occy once had for breakfast. 'It was the first time he'd got off the couch for a long time,' Bartholomew says. 'He was paddling for a wave in very gentle surf, bulging out of a

big wet suit and his head was all red because he was squeezed so tightly into the wet suit, and he missed the wave and I was kind of embarrassed, and he looked around at me and burst out laughing. We laughed for half an hour. I hope he won't mind me saying this, but he looked like a dugong.'

Later that day, on the Bells clifftop, a sports medicine expert who'd once called Occy one of the fittest guys he'd seen, said to him: 'My God, you've let yourself go to the pack.'

'The guy literally did a double-take,' Bartholomew remembers. 'It was highly embarrassing. It was time to shuffle him off the beach. Occy was devastated by that. It was a cold, hard thing that friends sometimes can't say.'

Occy remembers that day at Bells as the start of his comeback.

His friends – Rabbit, Gordon, fellow pro surfer Luke Egan – were behind him. But he needed a spur. It came in the form of Beatrice Ballardie, a woman in her mid-30s with a teenage son, Raynor. Occy told Beatrice he was once a pro surfer. She said she'd never heard of him and, besides, where were his boards? Those he hadn't snapped, he'd sold, he said. After a three-month romance, Occy and Beatrice were married.

In this one piece of fate, Occy had gained a level-headed, gentle persuader who 'grounded' him, weaned him off the junk food and created a happy home life; he had a new responsibility as a father figure; and he had recovered something long missing: motivation. Occy decided to re-join the tour and see if the old body could still do it.

'I need my wife and that home-away-from-home atmosphere,' he says now, 'otherwise I'm prone to go out with the boys and have a good time and not really focus on the contest at hand.' And Raynor? 'I just try and be a father figure. I also feel he's the brother I never had. Me and Raynor surf together, hang together. To have a brother is nice.'

Bea had believed in Occy when he was down and now, he says, it's an opportunity to pay her back. 'It's good to have the backing and the love that I have for Bea, to show her how good I can be at something.'

Occy decided to have one last shot at the world title. It was far-fetched, but he felt he owed it to himself at least to try. He saw a sports psychologist, went to a training camp in Western Australia where he donned a specially made padded tracksuit to sweat off his bulk, maintained a strict diet and resumed his daily early-morning surf.

'One day he pulled up in the car park at 5.30 a.m. to check out the surf,' remembers Bartholomew. 'For me it was pure joy. He would turn up every morning like a racehorse.'

The weight began to slide off. And surfing began to feel good again. In 1997 Occy battled through the qualifying heats and finished the year second to his friend Kelly Slater.

Last year, when he won at Bells Beach, triumphantly raising his arms as he surfed in, the world knew Occy was back.

He told an emotional crowd he was dedicating the win to his father, and began a ritual of placing an orange sticker on all his surfboards. 'Orange was his favourite colour, and it's mine, too,' he says now. 'It's just because I miss my dad a lot and it reminds me of him.'

This year, he won three contests and finally clinched the world title in mediocre surf in Brazil, leaving a dead rubber in Hawaii. It was a victory the surfing community had hardly dared hoped for. As the American surf writer Matt Warshaw wrote in 1997: 'The surfing world is simply a better and more interesting place with Occhilupo back on stage'.

What chance did he give himself? 'I didn't even ever think of being incredibly competitive,' Occy says. 'I was just losing my way.'

A beaming Pam Occhilupo was interviewed by Bruce

McAvaney on Channel Seven's *Sportsworld* last Sunday. 'He didn't have any chance to grow up,' she said, 'so he hibernated for a while.'

His friend Luke Egan, who surfs often with Occy around the Gold Coast where they both live, says, 'He's 33 and he loves it like he just started. We surf D-Bah [Duranbah] when it's one foot. He enjoys that as much as if he's surfing Pipeline.'

Occy's victory is also a victory for his straight-ahead style. 'He's beaten them with a style of surfing that they thought had been relegated to extinction,' Mark Richards says. 'Occy has stormed back with the basics.'

Next year Occy hopes Kelly Slater will return to the tour so the pair can slug it out. Like Borg and McEnroe, it may develop into a great sporting rivalry. 'He sent me a really beautiful fax when I won, said "I can't wait to see you in Hawaii",' Occy says.

Today, the famous gentle Occy optimism has remained surprisingly uneroded by his bad times. Asked to look back on himself at 13, he says: 'I was the same as I am now. Energetic, try to be funny all the time. Reckon I'm shy mostly, but a lot of people call me funny.' A broad grin. 'I'm like a cartoon character that surfs.'

*October 1999*

*Mark Occhilupo never regained his world surfing crown. At 38, after 22 years on the circuit, he said 2005 would be his last.*

# Peter Carey

Even given his large capacity to be surprised by what life serves up to him, New York still gives Peter Carey pause. As does the fact that he lives in a stylish 1830 house in the desirable West Greenwich Village, and makes a living from writing and teaching here.

Indeed, to be living a life anything above and beyond a humble brick veneer in a Melbourne suburb remains to Carey a source of some amazement.

'I imagined I'd grow up living in some suburb somewhere. I can even see the sort of house: a very suburban, double-fronted thing, not big, brick veneer, some outer Melbourne suburb.

'I didn't expect anything special at all. It was Australia in the '60s. You got a quid for publishing a short story in *Overland*.

And that was the world. It still seems amazing to me that I'm here. Every day it seems amazing . . . All the different things that have happened in my life seem miraculous because it all goes back to Bacchus Marsh.'

The Victorian country town known primarily for producing a Booker prize-winning writer (for *Oscar and Lucinda*) and a lion park, seems a long way away from the traffic winding its way up nearby Sixth Avenue and the intermittent whoops of NYPD sirens. Carey's life since growing up in the town he briefly put on the world stage last year, via a piece in *The Independent on Sunday* on going home, has been a series of happy accidents.

'I met this woman over here [theatre director Alison Summers], fell in love with her, immediately wanted to have children with her, and I did, and I discovered she really wanted to be in North America, so we house-swapped and I got to like it and we came here. It was how the dice fell.'

He is a whippet of a man, of slender body and a youthful, mischievous face, which is accommodating well the odd craggy line of middle age. You can still see in him the awkward footballer at Geelong Grammar, taking to the field with his spectacles, as he has recalled, stuck on with sticky tape, or the would-be poet and author idolising William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and trying to be bohemian.

As Carey eats minestrone in a little restaurant around the corner from his house, his almost boyish sense of wonder and his anxiety about his life refuse to be subjugated by the knowledge that he is an internationally respected writer.

'Here, I am a well-regarded literary writer, just another Joe. It's often a shock when I go to London and my books are for sale at the airport. Faber & Faber publish selections from each decade . . . of significant work, and the catalogue arrived and it was Tom Stoppard, Anne Sexton . . . and I was there. I am

regarded that way in London. I was very pleased. Childishly pleased.'

At 53 and with six novels and several awards under his belt, starting work on the next one is only marginally easier than the first. '[Writing] is one of those things when people do it they expect long periods of tedium, self-doubt and the continual inelegance of the prose until it comes right,' Carey says. 'That's the same as it's always been, despite there being moments of joy and discovery and pleasure and pride and mad excitement and grandiosity. You know you can solve something.

'When you're young you think it might just crash and it won't work. As you get older you know you can make it work somehow. That has some calming influence.'

Living in New York is 'brutal in terms of the sheer literary pecking order'. He no longer has to struggle to be noticed – his profile increased after an appearance on the cover of *The New York Review of Books* – and is relieved not to be one of the tribes of young hopefuls he often sees photocopying their manuscripts in the Village office-supply shops.

'When I watch people in this city trying to get on and the sheer desperation to be noticed, the drive, the networking . . . I never did any of those things. I was lucky I did it at a time and place where you could get noticed if you did the work properly. Once I decided I thought I could do this thing, I was obsessive about it and I worked really, really hard and I suppose I was ridiculously ambitious as far as the work . . . It was a different sort of ambition.'

This is Carey's sixth year in New York with Alison Summers and their two sons, Sam and Charlie. Has the city influenced his writing? 'No idea,' Carey says. 'I don't think about it much: should I be here, is it wrong for me to be here? There's a very high level of anxiety about that particular question. I follow ideas. Every novel I've written starts with an idea about

something and I follow where that idea leads. I wouldn't have written *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* had I not been here, I wouldn't have had the idea that led to it.'

Is place overvalued as a concept when we're talking about writing? 'I think it's really important, which is why I feel anxious. I have a belief that if you're engaged with your life, then that's probably the single most important thing that you can have as a writer. I'm stimulated. Even anxiety can be quite productive.'

Why the anxiety? 'If you live in Australia you can hope to know your society, instinctively, to feel it. If you exist in a place like this it's forever, you're not of it, everything's always strange, you don't know why anything is the way it is. If you stay away from your own country for a long time, you think you know about it, but you don't. Society is like rivers changing their banks all the time. Even my anxiety about being an Australian living in New York I would hope would be, finally, productive.'

Is it necessary to leave your home to understand it? 'People would say that to me at the beginning to excuse my departure – Australians, that is. Because we do have that thing, of people going away, as a sort of betrayal.' Has he felt that? 'Sure. "What, Australia not good enough for you?" Yeah. People would say, "What's the matter, you leaving already?" They would say, "It must be useful for you to be able to see Australia, to get away from it. Is that why you're doing it?" And I'd say, "No." But in the end, sometimes it does happen like that and you begin to see things about your country that are strange. And I hope that that's fruitful.'

As Carey prepares for *Oscar and Lucinda* to be filmed later this year, another project is taking his attention: his next book, which is a 'riff' on the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations*. 'That's a great novel. And Magwitch is a great character. This

is in no sense trying to pull it down or damage it. It's been called *Magwitch* in Australia for so long. None of it is set in Australia. It's all set in London, ends in May 1837 and it starts a couple of weeks before that. It's about the return to London of a character called Jack Maggs.'

Research will take him out of New York for a couple of weeks. 'In a few weeks I've got to go to a literary festival near Gloucester and, as it happens, I've got some research to do there. I knew my character had to go on a coach journey to meet with someone some distance from London and I didn't really care much where it was but I needed to be able to write about it.

'I found in William Cobbett, the English politician and writer who wrote a book called *Rural Rides*, that there's a brief description of coming into Gloucester from up high, so I thought, "That's it." My life's like that. Chance. And I've thought about life a lot like that.'

With their Greenwich Village house, and their weekender in the Catskill Mountains in upstate New York, the Careys are hardly struggling. But even a writer of Carey's status is not able to write full-time. After a year of teaching creative writing at New York University, he has taken a position at Princeton, in New Jersey. 'Why do I teach? I teach because I've got two little kids who go to a private school. I need to do it.' He found the NYU students 'pretty well-read, they liked writers I liked. There wasn't any narrow . . . they didn't all like Ray Carver, for instance, or Marquez. Being New York, they have this expectation that . . . they can make a living out of it and be famous tomorrow. It's like everywhere else. Occasionally, some student will sell a novel and will get terrific reviews. It happens.'

Did teaching sap him of energy for the writing? 'Sometimes when I was tired I'd get angry about having to read relatively

mediocre work when I could be reading great literature. So I had those moments. But for the most part it was nourishing. By having to continually help them find their way, say what they want to say.

'I'd say, "You've written all this, but what really engaged you was that bit there, is that right?" and they'd say, "How did you know that?" "I just know that. You don't have to do all this other stuff. Why don't you look at other ways that you might explore that more directly." When it works for them, it's very satisfying. It can be no bad thing to be thinking about other people and helping other people. Writers are notoriously self-absorbed.'

Martin Amis said journalism is good because it gets you out of the house. Was that the same as teaching for him? 'At NYU I made a lot of friends. I've still got very good friends I met in that period.'

Carey's first career was in advertising. He would write literary fiction in the mornings and work two afternoons a week at an agency (his most famous line was 'You make us smile, Dr Lindeman'). 'It was working with art directors, a little bit of copywriting, looking at problems with marketing and positioning. It was sort of ideal, really. I think I was too hard on it when I was there.

'It was a life where you could do your writing every day and never worry whether your books sell. In all my years in literature, the whole notion of who I was, literature always came first. I guess I'm pleased I don't do it any more. I now spend the same amount of time teaching as I spent working in advertising for about a thirtieth of the money. It had a lot to recommend it. It was a very, very attractive subsidy.

'I certainly took a lot of shit for doing it. The whole notion of a literary writer doing advertising seemed to be a contradiction, that it were god on one hand and the devil on the other.'

He gets great joy from watching his sons grow up. 'Charlie is five. I take him to the Guggenheim; he's got a good eye, it's a pleasure for him, then he can run down the ramp. Sam's nine; he's more interested in sports, basketball, follows the New York Knicks.'

Sam's love of sport has ignited a doused flame from Carey's youth. The sum of his upbringing – Bacchus Marsh; the teasing culture at Geelong Grammar, where he was a boarder; the passion to write and live an artistic life – meant his affection for sport has been submerged for many years. Only recently, with the influence of his New York friends, has it resurfaced.

'I grew up playing a lot of sports and watching a lot . . . Test matches, all that. Maybe you'll tell me this is not true, but one of the things in my experience: many of us, because of our position in society as artists, sort of stopped going to the football. I never stopped liking football, even though Melbourne is infantile about the football, really. I mean, it's ludicrous, there's no question about that. And yet when I came here, my American friends never suffered that. They just kept on being interested in sport. My writer friends know all about baseball. I'm sorry that happened [the loss of interest], because I think Aussie Rules is a beautiful game.'

Carey was front-page news in Australia last year when he published an extraordinary piece about the trials surrounding his young girlfriend undergoing an abortion in 1961, and the deaths, later, of three more children, including twins, at birth. It was testimony to Carey's strength as a writer, but it also underlined the danger of the writer exposing his life for his work.

The piece had been submitted, by invitation, to *The New Yorker* and was subsequently published in *The Australian* magazine. The front-page magazine treatment of such delicate material unnerved him. It began: 'Lately when I think of my

children I have begun to remember not just the four-year-old who is rattling on my door-knob as I write, or the eight-year-old whom I will take to a swimming lesson this afternoon, but those other children I have spent a long time trying to forget.'

'I wrote it for the *New Yorker*,' Carey says now. 'It was something I had actually wanted to do. God knows why. It was fine to write it in this town, a big city. I didn't think about how many people were going to see it. It was called *A Small Memorial* and it appeared here in a more modest way than it appeared in Australia, which was with a lot of fanfare. A small memorial was part of the point. When I saw the way it appeared I felt it was some sort of emotional grandstanding.'

Carey must leave. A family matter. He drains his coffee. He might feel anxiety still, but like any writer he'll use it, not lose it. 'On balance, I like my life. I'm engaged with it.' The famous, slightly crooked smile. 'To feel anxious about things is no bad thing.'

*June 1996*

*Five years after this interview, Peter Carey won the Booker Prize for* The True History of the Kelly Gang. *In 2004 he published* My Life as a Fake. *Carey's wife, Alison Summers, was in the basement of the World Trade Center when the first plane struck on September 11 2001. She escaped unharmed.*

# Donlevy Fitzpatrick

It is a little odd to see a man so associated with Melbourne in such a quintessentially Sydney setting. The back garden of the house Donlevy Fitzpatrick and his wife, Uschi, are renting is washed by the waters of Palm Beach, an hour north of the city. There's a dinghy with a little outboard engine and a canoe that he often pulls down a little wooden ramp to the beach. Four pelicans glide across the water. A sea plane whines overhead.

In April this year, Don, 57, and Uschi, 29, married on the lawn with just close family in attendance. Across the water is the thick bush of the Ku-ring-gai National Park, where the Fitzpatricks have bought land and plan to build. It's a long way

from the dirty streets of St Kilda where he became famous, from the burnt-out buildings he restored, the licensing laws he fought and the casual, European-style dining and drinking that, at The Dog's Bar, The George and The Melbourne Wine Room, he helped to pioneer. Those frantic days have receded for him now. After being diagnosed in April last year with two brain tumours and given between three and nine months to live, Don has decided to build a new life, away from the city, bars and cafes, where you don't have to stay up all night and talk all day.

'Do you know what happened to me?' he says as we shake hands. He's wearing a green T-shirt, black thongs, a small bracelet on his right wrist. The left side of his head is shaved, a sign of ongoing treatment. He speaks hesitantly, often in incomplete sentences, searching for words, the frustration of not being able to find them obvious. Always Uschi is there with details and support.

We walk to a wooden outdoor table and sit under a market umbrella. Uschi has brought a pot of coffee and some croissants. It's a good spot for the Fitzpatricks to tell their story about being given a death sentence and refusing to accept it. It is a story of a man lucky enough to have been born with the will to fight. And lucky enough to have married a woman strong enough to help save his life.

In the late '80s and through the '90s, if you sat down for a beer or a coffee at one of his places, you would more than likely have seen Donlevy Fitzpatrick clearing dirty glasses from a table, leaning at the bar as if it were the first rest he'd had all day, or joining a table of diners for a glass of wine. He worked from early morning to last thing at night, but you didn't see his exhaustion. Instead, you saw an elegant, mellow man with a gentle charisma.

He was the pioneer and symbol of St Kilda's rebirth. He was

there before every second joint was a cafe, before house prices rocketed, before the rich moved in. He was the antithesis of the vulgar developer, slightly reserved, softly spoken. 'He was never really the front man,' says his friend John van Haandel, the owner with his brother, Frank, of St Kilda's Prince of Wales complex and The Stokehouse. 'He was more comfortable sitting down talking about ideas.'

After his first successful venture – Donlevy's in Middle Park, which he opened in the late '70s –Don went to Europe. He returned with an urge to recreate the way of life he'd experienced abroad. A building called Harley Court in Acland Street seemed the appropriate venue to do it. He developed apartments, a cafe and a bar that, in line with the newly reformed licensing laws, was to become famous: The Dog's Bar. With its snack-heavy menu, The Dog's Bar attracted paint-spattered artists, Versace-suited real estate agents and everyone in between. Deals were done, love affairs started. But despite its success, Don was frustrated by the council's refusal to allow him to open up the building's rooftop garden.

'I love gardens,' he says now. 'In Melbourne, everything was inside. This place was all garden, vines growing, pizza ovens. But they wouldn't let me use it. Because I couldn't make that building what it was meant to be, I saw the opportunity to do The George and put my frustration to bed.'

The once magnificent George was then run-down and disused. At one stage, there was talk of it becoming a brothel. Don felt it deserved better. 'It was frightening. They had no feeling that this street was a boulevard, that it was important.'

It was a courageous move. Fitzroy Street was still home to prostitutes and junkies. The St Kilda railway station across the road was a shell. In The George, some of the rooms were knee-deep in water. Don was scared just walking into it. With the blessing of the council, he spent $8 million developing the

site into 40 apartments, bars, cafes and a bakery/cafe. Just as The Dog's Bar had done, The George captured the mood of the times, the casual eating and drinking at all hours of the day. 'You would have to be as unusual as Donlevy to have come up with this package,' said architect Dimity Reed in 1996.

As a one-time civil engineer, he loved buildings, but as a Francophile and wine-lover he believed passionately that Victoria's licensing laws needed to be reformed. In May last year, when his illness was reported, Brian Kearney, the director of Liquor Licensing, wrote to *The Age*: 'The benefit that we all enjoy as a consequence of the diversity of licensed businesses in Victoria, including the bar scene, is very much a consequence of Don's unrelenting challenging of the status quo of licensing law . . . All the industry now owes a great debt to him.'

Ever restless, in 1995 Don planted grapes at his property, Clyde Park, near Geelong. He grew so much fruit that he was overwhelmed. He decided to sell, exhausted by the idea of doing his own wine. He was tired. 'I'd like to relax a little,' he said in 1995, 'but I don't want to die.' The next year he told a journalist: 'The past few years have been very physically draining.'

And then he met Uschi. In 1998, Don was having a drink in The George Public Bar, a little downstairs place below the main building. This was not unusual. His first marriage had broken up when he was in his late 20s; to comfort himself he went out and got drunk. 'I think I've been enjoying a drink ever since,' he said in 1997. (He has a son, James, 21, from another relationship and two children, Nina, 12, and Gio, seven, from his second marriage). Uschi Yee, a young production designer for Joe Saba who was a regular at The George, was friendly with Don, but 'that night our knees touched and sparks flew,' she says. 'And that was it.'

In early 2002, Don was consumed by yet another project. He'd bought a 243-hectare parcel of land around Wye River, near Lorne, on Victoria's Great Ocean Road. His dream was an environmentally sensitive development incorporating an 'eco-facility' with accommodation for bushwalkers in the nearby Otway forests and a small amount of low-density housing. Most of the land, though, he wanted to donate back to the state government to manage it for public use. It was a complicated development with a lot of interested parties, and Don would often lie awake at night working through it. 'I was going a bit loopy, as I always do,' he says. 'I was extremely conscious that it needed to do a lot of things for a lot of people.'

'His mind would never stop,' Uschi says. 'There wasn't a lot of relief from it. Most people go home at night and switch off, where Don would think about it all night. There was just never a moment when his mind wasn't working.' Always there were ideas. He spent his days talking to builders, councils, architects, wine-makers, bar patrons. Talking all day long, he says. He would come home to Uschi and tell her, 'I am so sick of talking, I just don't want to talk any more.'

One Sunday afternoon in April last year, Don and Uschi were having lunch at France-Soir, in Toorak Road, South Yarra. Don suddenly got up from the lunch table and went outside. Uschi followed him out. He was trying to say he was having trouble talking but, Uschi remembers, 'It came out backwards.' 'I knew something was just not working,' he says. 'I said (to myself), "This is different. Something has occurred which is new."' Uschi adds, 'I could see on his face that something wasn't right.'

Don and Uschi left the restaurant, picked up Gio and Nina from a party and dropped them home, then headed to a hospital emergency room. They thought it might have been a minor stroke. After a doctor gave him a CT scan, Don was

told he could leave. But another doctor suggested he stay overnight and undergo an MRI scan in the morning to check for the presence of a brain tumour. 'Don said, "We won't stay, we'll go out for dinner," ' Uschi remembers.

Their innocence was about to be shattered. Soon afterwards, Don had more trouble talking. That was when they realised something was terribly wrong. 'Uschi, Uschi, Uschi' he repeated over and over. It was the only word he could say. He began to shake violently as seizures gripped him. Uschi pressed the panic button. 'I almost collapsed,' she says. 'Nurses had to hold me up. You have no idea what it is. One day nothing's wrong and suddenly . . .' Don spent the next two days in intensive care. 'I didn't know what had happened,' he says. 'It was two days before I knew who I was and where I was from.'

The MRI, performed while he was unconscious, revealed the presence of two tumours on his brain, news Uschi had to deal with alone. When Don awoke in intensive care the next day, she jumped into bed with him. 'I was so excited,' she remembers. On the third day in hospital, doctors removed the larger tumour. 'We were praying that it was benign, but it wasn't,' Uschi says. They stayed in hospital 10 days, Uschi not leaving his side except to sleep on the floor of the waiting room.

When the results came back from pathology, it was terrible news. Don had a gliobastoma multiforme (known as GBM), the most aggressive form of brain cancer. 'When the surgeon came back with the results I remember his expression and it was . . . he didn't eyeball me at all,' says Don. 'Just matter of fact, "You won't be here by Christmas." We were given a prognosis of three to nine months.' They asked what sort of treatment was available. They were told radiotherapy could keep it at bay for a few months. 'But,' the doctor added, 'why

would you bother spending your last months of life on chemotherapy?' He told them to go home and get their affairs in order.

Uschi remembers: 'I said to him, "There must be people who have survived this?" And he wouldn't look at us. He just looked at the floor. You don't know how to feel. It's a situation you never imagine being in.' Don says, 'They didn't have the answers. We had to find the answers.'

The prognosis for such a cancer is generally bad. Fifty per cent of patients diagnosed with GBM survive 10 to 12 months. The chance of survival beyond two years is just 20 per cent. But Don and Uschi had no time for these numbers. They were too committed to him living. 'I felt that I was in a bubble and it was a different world that I was looking at from the bubble. There was nothing out there that I wanted to be part of . . . They had abandoned hope.'

Uschi threw herself into becoming an expert on cancer. She spent hours on the Internet searching for details and experts on brain tumours, people who might be able to help them. She made contact with survivors, among them a man in his fifties in California who was still alive eight years after being given a GBM diagnosis. She spent every day on the phone, talking to specialists around Australia, in the UK, the US and Germany. 'She's kept him positive and maintained a very optimistic view of his disease,' says Dr Nick Pavlakis, medical oncologist at Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital. 'And that has contributed to his sense of wellbeing.'

The Fitzpatricks needed to get out of Melbourne. They moved to Sydney for a while before taking up the invitation of John van Haandel to stay as long as they wanted at his house on the water at Byron Bay. 'He loved Byron,' Van Haandel says. 'He didn't have to know anyone, he didn't have to talk to anyone.'

Despite Don's fluctuating speech – 'There was a time when Don couldn't count to five,' says Uschi, 'it was terrifying' – and the poor odds, neither of them gave up hope. 'We felt there was hope from the word go,' Don says. 'No matter what was said to us at the beginning we felt it just didn't apply to us. There were only two occasions in the whole year that I felt a bit lost. The rest we knew there was a battle to be fought. When these doctors tell you you are going to die . . . we knew immediately there was another way. Part of my psyche has always been to battle . . . not lay down.'

After initial success, Don appeared to relapse, which meant he needed a second operation. The survivor in California with whom Uschi was in contact suggested he try a cocktail of five different drugs in combination with chemotherapy. 'I spoke to a lot of oncologists,' Uschi says. 'No one was prepared to offer even one of these drugs, let alone all five of them. It was a very frustrating period.' With the guidance of Dr Nick Pavlakis the 'cocktail' approach was made possible.

Frank van Haandel, John's brother, put Don and Uschi in touch with Professor Avni Sali, who ran the Graduate School of Integrative Medicine at Swinburne University, where doctors were taught about using different types of approaches to disease. After a long telephone conversation with Sali, the couple flew to Melbourne the next day to meet him. His role in Don's recovery has been significant. Along with traditional chemotherapy, he has followed Professor Sali's advice and undergone a treatment called microwave therapy, in conjunction with radiation treatment. He has also stuck to a strict diet and meditated daily.

Don and Uschi had become a formidable team. The level of Uschi's knowledge impressed the medical people with whom the couple worked. 'She would ask very specific questions to a group of doctors,' says Professor Sali, 'and they'd say, "I'll get

back to you on that."' Says one of Don's closest friends, architect Neil Radcliff: 'Don, in many ways, owes her his life.'

The second operation, performed by Dr Ray Cook last December, went well. There is now no sign of active disease in Don's brain. He still has chemotherapy 14 days each month and is on a range of other drugs. Dr Nick Pavlakis judges him to be in complete remission. 'I haven't seen anyone do as well as he has,' he says. 'He is exceptional.'

Don's illness has dictated the rhythm of their lives. Don reads architecture magazines (though sometimes he finds himself reading the same sentence five times), walks with Uschi along the beach, has a paddle in the canoe. He no longer jumps up when the phone rings. All he wants now is peace. He says not being able to talk was a 'godsend'.

While Don is recovering, Uschi has become a facilitator for others in Don's position. She says she and Don are trying to change the culture associated with fighting cancer, to encourage doctors and patients to try harder, to broaden the range of treatments. Not to give in. The day before we met, she received emails from the US, the UK and South Africa asking about Don's progress. 'Once you hit the 18-month mark, you're seen as a survivor.'

The tumour was the turning point of Don's life. He won't categorically link his hard work with the disease but, he says, 'I dwelled on so much. I think my brain was having a feed on the adrenaline.' He now wants a more peaceful life. 'We knew straight away everything had to change. Quickly. Get away from all that city sort of stuff and just think about the next phase.' He says he had been starting to remove himself psychologically from the city even before his diagnosis. 'I used to come to Melbourne from Wye River or my little house in the Otways. Six years ago it became obvious that as I was hitting Werribee and my body was saying, "Hey, I don't really need

this." And I don't know whether something was there (in the brain) a little bit, but every time, I knew I wasn't meant to be there.'

A year ago, 100 friends from Melbourne's wine and food world gathered on a St Kilda football oval standing side-by-side and holding hands to send a message of hope to Don. The photographer Rennie Ellis, a close friend who died in August this year, said some moving words. In a letter distributed that day, Don's former wife, Patrizia Autore, wrote: 'May our collective energy create a healing force that will help (Don) through these tough times.' 'I've never felt anything like it,' says Neil Radcliff, 'this magnetic feeling.'

The healing force was felt up in Sydney that day. As Don and Uschi were lying in long grass on the foreshore contemplating surgery the next day, 'I really felt a strong connection,' Don says. 'You start to realise a little bit that there are other things up there . . . We're not talking about miracles, but the spirit of people.'

*December 2003*

*Don's doctors believe the procedures to remove the tumours were successful. Uschi tells me Don's speech is now better than it was when we met and he continues his recovery. After this article appeared, Uschi received many enquiries about Don's treatment.*

# Peter Costello

The doorstop interview is over. He has answered the questions about the interest rate rise. And now Peter Costello is sitting in his Canberra office doing some hard analysis. Not of the economy or the political mood. The treasurer is unpacking the hidden, sometimes Freudian and often prescient themes to be found in the television show *Get Smart*.

'There was a lot that was deep about that program,' he says. 'The never-ending war between Kaos and Control. It was sort of ahead of its time. I remember once when Siegfried got towelled up for doing something wrong and he said, "All of this is because my mother wouldn't give me a snow sled. Why wouldn't she give me a snow sled? Do you think it was because we lived in Florida?" So he'd become evil because he'd been

treated inhumanely, whereas Max, of course, was always for the forces of niceness and goodness.'

Costello is well known for his impersonations of the bumbling Maxwell Smart, but we're not treated to one today. Instead, invited to talk about music, he breaks into some lines from 'Come Back Again' by Daddy Cool, a band he remembers as the big thing when he was a kid.

Not that Peter Costello could be accused of ever having been a swinging hipster. He's listening to Van Morrison's 'Brown-Eyed Girl' in the car at the moment, but his taste can be suspect. 'Barry Jones once got picked up by the guy who used to drive me. He said, "Let's turn on some of the Treasurer's CDs. Have we got a Mahler?" "No." "Tchaikovsky?" "No." "Do we have some symphonies? Well, who does the treasurer have in his CD stack?" said Barry. The driver said, "A Mr Meatloaf, Barry." Barry said, "I don't think we will listen to the treasurer's CDs." ' Costello laughs at the memory.

It's sometimes easy to forget that Peter Costello is only 46, part of the baby boomer generation raised on Mel Brooks' television masterwork and early '70s Oz rock. It could be because he achieved prominence young – in his late twenties he was a star Melbourne barrister, at 32 a federal MP, a candidate for deputy leader at 35, shadow treasurer at 36 and treasurer at 38. It could be that young right-wingers, of which, in Melbourne in the '70s, he was the obvious star, always seemed older and shorter-haired than their opposite numbers. Or that when he started out as a 27-year-old barrister in May 1984 he chose to launch himself into the heavy-duty, unglamorous and very grown-up world of tax law.

He is 18 years younger than his leader, but the electorate has not always noticed. And this remains Peter Costello's chief political challenge. As he prepares for yet another year in

his long-running role as The Man Who Would Be Prime Minister, Costello's job is to get himself known. And maybe liked.

Being treasurer for eight years has not exactly been the greatest way to win the electorate's love. 'It is a difficult job,' he says. 'You are the person that at the end of the day has to make all the sums add up, and the tendency is for all of your colleagues to announce the good news and then you can announce how it's all going to be paid for. A lot of downside in this job and not that much upside.'

It's not hard to get the impression that Peter Costello wants a bit more of that upside. That, having been told in June by John Howard that he will have to keep waiting if he wants to lead the party, he wants to show the human being behind the man who points at whiteboards to explain the budget to journalists. Peter Costello wants to break free.

'I've been interested in foreign policy all my life but because I've been the treasurer for so long and people only hear you talking about economics, [they] think that's all you're interested in,' he says. 'I'm interested in so much more.'

But it's a difficult path to travel. Treasurers don't often, in former treasurer Paul Keating's words, get to 'throw the switch to vaudeville'. And, as deputy leader to a prime minister who likes his ministers to work from scripts in their own fields and he'll do the overview, it's hard for Costello to punch through with his own views on anything but the economy. 'That's his day job,' says long-time friend Michael Kroger of his role as treasurer. 'At present [the electorate] sees a strong fiscal manager and those people are not always popular.'

Social activist and the treasurer's brother, Tim Costello, says, 'Howard is free to be the father figure of the nation, hugging Bali victims, doing things nobody thought he was good

at but is clearly enjoying, looking compassionate and caring, the whole thing a treasurer has none of.'

Two Peter Costellos, one largely hidden. Liberal backbencher and Costello supporter Bruce Baird says that because he is 'so on top of his craft', people's views on him are 'not always necessarily positive'. He says a re-think often occurs when they get up close. 'People who have heard him give a speech or attend a dinner with him or get to know him as a person, they often change their views,' he says.

So, what is this other side of Peter Costello and where can we see it? A restaurant in Spring Street in the heart of his beloved Melbourne seems a good place to start. We have walked from his office in Treasury Place and along Spring Street. He is a big man, but passes unnoticed among the lunchtime pedestrians. With the blue suit, white shirt and casual geniality of the powerful, he could be any business type up from Collins Street.

In the restaurant, it's the same. Sitting here with a glass of white wine and a crowd of noisy punters you see more of the other side of Peter Costello than any number of performances at the dispatch box. The booming laugh, for a start, a big roaring thing that usually tends to accompany comments by him or others of an amusingly absurdist nature. It reaches its highest volume when reminded of a question *BRW* magazine recently asked him: 'How would you feel serving in an Abbott Government?'

He shows some delight in a joke, admires the fashionably gloomy light and wood-panelled style of the restaurant and appears to be enjoying blending into this crowd, like he does at his son's football matches in Camberwell. 'I'm one of a number of dads. They might chip you a bit. I can remember being the goal umpire and all the dads were saying, "Don't trust him to add up the scores properly. That bloke's no good

with numbers".' When he picks up the kids from parties, it's the same. 'Parents realise that you're a parent like them with the same problems and they treat you the same. That's the way I like to be treated.'

Today there's no talk of bracket creep, fiscal drag or any other epithets from the world of economics, the dismal science. Instead we talk about the pleasures Costello derives from his backyard barbecue, mending his daughter's bicycle, the two parts of the hedge he's growing (which he happily reports will soon meet), and watching *Kath and Kim* with his family.

He revels in the differences of the generations, rather than hooking into an occasional tendency for baby boomer dads to want to be like big kids themselves. He does not pretend to be a hip dad. Ten years ago he might have been called a 'young fogey'. Understand his children's music? 'No,' he says with emphasis.

One night, just a couple of days before the 1998 federal election, Costello gave a speech to 500 members of the Chinese community. Asked later whether he could do a little something to help victims of a recent flood in China, he happily agreed. The sting was he had to get up and sing karaoke. He hopped on to the stage and, with a vision of John Denver on a screen behind him, sang 'Take Me Home, Country Roads'. 'Of course he knew all the words, which is sort of embarrassing in itself,' says Tony Smith, then Costello political adviser and now Liberal MP. 'His staff were sitting there thinking, "Thank God there's only wire reporters here."'

His children also witness their father's lack of popular-culture credibility. 'I rang home on Monday night to speak to my kids and they greeted me with the news that Cosima had been evicted [from *Australian Idol*],' Costello says. 'They greeted this as tragic news. Cosima's been thrown out! "Yeeess" [hesitatingly]. Cosima. "Thrown out of what?" [In loud voice]

"Thrown out of *Idol*! She resigned!" "Oh, dear me. Isn't that dreadful." '

The famous Costello smirk, often seen accompanied by crossed arms projecting a weary superiority, is not evident today. ABC comedy program *CNNN* days earlier approached him with a patch for his arm to help him stop smirking. As usual, he laughed along. 'If that's the worst they can say about you, then you haven't got much to be ashamed of.'

He may wave it away, but the smirk is the physical manifestation of Costello's image problem as arrogant and smug. Those who know him paint a picture of a different person. 'The electorate thinks that treasurers are smug,' says Michael Kroger. 'Smug is a synonym for competent. The alternative is unthinkable, that's someone who has nothing to be smug about.'

Tony Smith says, 'He's one of the few politicians with an ability to laugh at himself and see the lighter side of life.'

And Tim Costello: 'He's actually quite funny and quite graceful on a lot of things, but people don't know that. Being treasurer has had a huge impact on his spontaneity. The first word and final word in his job has been caution.'

'Look at this.' Costello leads me from his office into an adjoining room. On the wall are pictures of James Hird and other memorabilia. It's an Essendon Football Club shrine in here. Former Bomber Michael Long was unrepresented on the wall, so he sent in a framed series of three photos of himself. Everyone wants to be noticed by the club's number-one ticket holder. Costello says he loves the idea that people who don't worship Essendon have to wait in there before appointments. 'Like torture,' he laughs.

His love of Essendon is profound. He wants his team to

win. And by a lot. 'I'll never come home and say, "That was a great game because we won by a point." I'll come home and say, "That was a great game" if we won by 10 goals. I actually go to the football to watch my team win. I don't go to watch a good game.'

Ever the winner. So far it's been his political lot. And that famous hiccup on 3 June – the day John Howard told Costello he was staying – was, according to his friends, now regarded as a passing irritant. But on the day a clearly shattered Costello told a news conference it wasn't his 'happiest day' and that he intended to 'contribute on a wide range of issues'.

Today he talks about his February meeting with the prime minister where succession was discussed. 'I don't want to endlessly go on about this because people will think that that's all I ever dwell [on]. It's not.

'We had a discussion in February. He had indicated for many years he was going to consider his position and announce it in July. We discussed what that decision might be and yet [he had] not made a final decision at that point. It was very, very open as to what the decision might be. As a consequence of that I knuckled down and I did the budget, and the next discussion we had was in June.'

Costello did not disguise his disappointment that day. 'Frankly, I think if I'd have stood up and done the "Hail, fellow, well met" bonhomie, [puts on happy voice] "sure, nothing better's ever happened to me in my life, this is a wonderful event", first of all, it would not have been credible and, secondly, the public would have been entitled to say, "You're not genuine."'

Did he feel as though it was going to be a huge journey ahead to become prime minister? 'Oh, look, it's more this: that you operate under a set of assumptions for a number of years; the assumptions change. You've got to put this in context.

There are far worse things that happen to a lot of people than me. At the end of that day it wasn't my happiest day, right? Still alive, still got my health, I've got my family and I've got my job. So we're going to move on.'

A friend of Costello's said this: 'He had about a week where he clearly was pissed off but he bounced back very quickly. He knows he's a heartbeat away.' He displays a greeting card on the mantelpiece in his Canberra office that reads: 'Never, never, never give up.'

But despite Costello's shrugs, the exhaustive task of putting together eight budgets and this month starting on his ninth – a process that grinds on through January and ends in May – is clearly not one the treasurer is relishing. 'The hardest part about it is that you are stuck in Canberra for long periods of time when the rest of your colleagues go back to their electorates, or tour seats or whatever they do. All that break is just basically so the treasurer and senior financial ministers can sit there in Canberra on their own and just work. It's quite lonely, there are few people in Canberra, it's very intense and it takes a lot of work.'

'The amount of work for a treasurer – burying yourself in details, saying, "No, no, no, cut, cut, cut," – is very deadening,' says Tim Costello.

So does he have the energy to go on for the five years some believe it may be until he has another crack at it? 'I'm not even thinking about all that. I've got a lot of energy. I work hard. I've worked hard all my life. Ever since I was a student and when I was self-employed and I had a wife and a son to support, I knew this: if I didn't work I didn't eat.'

The three Costello children – Sebastian, 16, Madeleine, 15, and Phoebe, nine – might think their dad works a bit too hard. When parliament is sitting he's only home at weekends, and even then time is tight. It has become a real issue in his

life, and he admires his wife Tanya 'enormously' for managing the family and working as a lawyer herself.

'I think she must be a saint,' he says. 'I think it's a very difficult life for her, that from Monday to Friday she is essentially a single parent. I think one of the worst things about this job is that you are expected to live in one city and work in another. I think that is incredibly hard on families. And even when you are at home you are not really at home because I will go home for this weekend but on Saturday I will drive to Shepparton and spend a day [there] and on Sunday I will drive out to functions in the electorate. So when you say you're home on the weekend, that probably means two or three hours.'

Costello says he has concerns that politics is dominating lives at a cost. 'You know, I think one of the most difficult things, particularly in these senior jobs, is that the time demands become so extreme and you're trying to fit in so many people – first of all you have night meetings, then you start having breakfast meetings, then you start having Sunday meetings. What you find is you're no longer having meetings with normal people. The people that are coming through your door are lobbyists, colleagues, foreign dignitaries, constituents; it's happening 15 hours a day and soon it's happening seven days a week.

'And you don't have enough time for the people who should be your friends, and relatives and neighbours. And this, I think, is one of the bad things about politics – it's becoming all-consuming. I think this is a trap.

'I'm determined as far as possible to help my family lead a normal life. I don't think my family wants to know that I'm worried about the budget deficit or the taxation of share options. I don't think my kids want to know that. If I'm home and they want Dad, they want him to fix their bike. So on Saturday that's what I did, I fixed my daughter's bike.'

It's occasionally weird having a dad as treasurer, but usually they cope all right, he says. Have they copped stick? 'I'm sure they have, but they don't complain. They're pretty good kids. I'm sure they wouldn't appreciate it, but there's not much you can do about it.

'They're quite interested in what goes on. My son is studying economics. Half the economics textbook consists of opinion pieces on how bad a job the Commonwealth treasurer is doing, which I suspect he finds interesting in his classes. He brought his textbook home the other day and I opened it up and it begins with a cartoon of me [and the words]: "The Federal Treasurer claims he's slayed the inflation dragon. Discuss." I haven't asked to see his essay.'

There are other dragons left to slay, one being the feeling that Costello has so far failed to break out of his treasury role to talk about other issues on which he is known to have strong views, including reconciliation. 'There's no broadening,' says shadow treasurer Mark Latham. 'There's been no real impact at all about public debate. If he's straitjacketed [as treasurer], don't promise to broaden. He's in no-man's land.'

But ranging outside the extraordinary daily demands of treasury is difficult, says Shaun Carney, author of *Peter Costello: The New Liberal*. 'I'm not sure you have the headspace to formulate ideas that go beyond generalised positions on issues outside treasury,' Carney says. 'The spirit's willing but the flesh is weak.'

Meanwhile, Costello spends as much time as he can in Melbourne, where his friends and political support base live. He watched the city in which he grew up stagger with the effects of the recession in the early '90s then find new life. 'I can remember in a strip shopping centre in Armadale there were 50 vacant stores,' he says. He tries to ensure Melbourne is fairly represented nationally. 'One of the reasons I think

Graeme Samuel is a good appointment [as chairman of the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission] is that he's from Melbourne and that's a significant regulator. A lot of the other regulators are now based in Sydney – the Reserve Bank, APRA – and I think Melbourne should get its fair share of federal appointments.'

For Costello, the wait for the top job continues, as will the talk about it. But he is more interested in talking about how politicians who live politics 'day by day' can lose themselves in their own world. 'Sometimes you've got to meet people who say, "That's not the issue for me; the issue for me is how the kids are going at school today, the issue to me is how are we going to find an extra two kids to keep a cricket club going on a Saturday morning. The issue to me is why the Rotary meeting is going down the tubes."

'Politics should be limited. It is an important aspect of life, but it is not the only aspect of life. A lot of people in politics make that mistake.'

If he achieves his long-held goal of becoming prime minister, there'll be plenty of 15-hour days and meetings with non-'normal' people.

Where to now for him? 'He probably needs for John Howard to lead them to victory at the next election more than Howard does in the hope that he can take over in the next term,' says Shaun Carney.

The political life itself has not come out of our meetings with Costello all that well. He is most animated when talking about his family. He describes a happy day in his life. 'It's at home, when I can flick through the papers without reading any agitating stories. If you haven't been attacked that day it puts you in a really sunny mood; where I can go out for a walk with my wife, come home and fire up the barbecue, sit in the sun and eat my lamb cutlets, maybe dig out a few

weeds, prune the hedge and maybe sit down at night and watch a great sporting contest. There you are [spreads his arms wide apart] – 'Suburban man in his native habitat. Homo suburbianus!'

*November 2003*

*When the Coalition won the 2004 federal election, Peter Costello saddled up to present his ninth budget.*

# Philip Nitschke

Dr Philip Nitschke or, as he's often known, Dr Death, is today talking about his own near-death experience. Aged 10, he was sitting at the family dinner table on a Sunday night and sucking on a piece of plastic tubing. To his horror, he inhaled it and it lodged in his windpipe. He could not breathe or speak. All he could do was point at his throat.

'My mother was looking at me saying, "What's wrong with the boy?"' he remembers. 'I'm going [points at throat]. My father swung around, leapt to his feet, upended the table, grabbed me, upended me, gave me this bloody great whack on the back.

'Before that the radio was getting louder and louder and you could hear the blood in your ears getting louder and louder and your heart was getting faster and faster because I

was losing oxygen, and he gave me a whack and the thing dropped out of my throat and I could breathe. It had been total obstruction.'

For a man who spends his life surrounded by imminent death, there is a special poignancy about the story. Since then, the life of Philip Nitschke has been never less than dramatic, and a look inside his world reveals the drama is not all on the surface. His total absorption into the world of voluntary euthanasia has meant the rest of his life is virtually in a state of perpetual pause.

Ask about his solace and releases from the life of helping people find a way to die at a time of their own choosing, and he reveals he has almost no private life and that those close to him suffer because of it.

His partner of 12 years, paediatrician Dr Tristan Pawsey, and his mother, Gwen Nitschke, live in Adelaide. He lives just outside Darwin. He gets to Adelaide when he can. For the past three months, he has been on the Gold Coast, seeing Nancy Crick, a 69-year-old great-grandmother from the Gold Coast who became a national figure after chronicling her suicide plans in an Internet diary, virtually every day.

His 24-year-old son from another relationship is finishing a PhD in chemistry in Hobart. It makes for a life of almost constant travel and no respite from the demands of his cause. Indeed, one writer suggested he was 'oblivious to anything but his work'.

'[This commitment to the cause] has greatly affected my personal life,' he says. 'I'm travelling all the time, don't have very much of an opportunity to maintain personal relationships which are important to me. I've just spent three months on the Gold Coast and I haven't been able to devote time to personal relationships. It doesn't worry me that much. I don't actually demarcate so-called personal life and my work. In

some ways, it's just a continuum. I just do this all the time. But I know it's tough on people who are close to me.

'I think people feel that you should be able to switch off. I saw Nancy [Crick] every day, dealing with the myriad issues, 1001 things she wanted to address, and it didn't leave a lot of time for me. She was quite sympathetic to that, actually. She was sensitive to my needs. She'd say, "Why don't you take some time off, why don't you go back to Adelaide, spend some time away from the situation?" '

But walking away, even for a short time, is not easy. 'I find I start to get anxious if I get too far away from the mobile phone,' he says.

He is famously intense and forthright about himself. A close friend, Des Carne, met Dr Nitschke during the anti-nuclear movement in the early '80s, lived with him in Sydney and has taken two trips with him into the desert. 'His whole approach is to be completely honest,' Mr Carne says. 'Some people find that disarming, challenging or even threatening. He's not afraid of talking about his foibles.'

This afternoon, the GP who performed the world's first legal euthanasia in 1997, before the Federal Government overturned the Northern Territory law, is sitting in a cafe opposite Melbourne's Botanic Gardens. It's a peaceful setting for a man at the centre of yet another storm, a week after the death of Nancy Crick and two days after Sandy Williamson's *60 Minutes* and newspaper appearances.

His newest battle is dealing with the barrage of criticism he is receiving for not making it clear there was no absolute diagnosis of cancer for Nancy Crick while, he claims, Crick's family and members of Exit Australia knew there was no such diagnosis.

'We should have said, "We can't be certain here," and it would have protected us in some way from what's now coming,'

he says. 'We all knew it, we did understand it, Nancy knew it, but it wasn't being made as public as it should have been. That was a mistake which I would have done better at if I'd been thinking. You often find yourself trying to do things almost on the run.

'One needs to exercise personal integrity. If you make mistakes, admit it and try to make sure you don't make them again.'

Campaigning for voluntary euthanasia has consumed Dr Nitschke's life. He talks about having to control his temper when frustrations get the better of him. 'I will be watching a television report and someone will say something which annoys me and I will start a tirade of, usually, abuse at the person on the television,' he says. 'My language can be very rough in that situation, and [Tristan] will say, "I can't stand it," and just walk off. She will say, "Let me know when you've calmed down." I'm better at controlling it these days. I don't like to distress other people when I sense that that's what's happening. I just get sick of watching the same old arguments being dragged out and I think, "Oh God, how long do we have to keep on dealing with this?" It's certainly something that's upset Tristan a lot in the past.'

Tristan says, 'I have had to exit stage left sometimes. If he's angry, he's angry and then it's all over. He never keeps a grudge.'

He no longer works as a doctor. He has closed his medical practice in the Northern Territory. He outlines, again with disarming honesty, the 'media-management role' which has largely replaced his work as a doctor. He lives by donations to his organisation, Exit Australia, which fund a modest wage, air fares, hotel accommodation, rental cars and legal advice on the various state laws on a case-by-case basis. The organisation has not been the recipient of any bequests from people it's

helped. 'People have been generous,' he says. When Nancy Crick's story hit the headlines, the donations flooded in.

Of material possessions, he says he has 'almost none'. He drives a 1989 Holden Commodore and has barely any money to spend on fun, if he had the inclination. He lives in a tin shed with a 'mezzanine floor and a bit of living accommodation' on a two-hectare block outside Darwin. 'It's occasionally featured on bits of film and people say, "My God, do you really live in that shed?" Suits me absolutely fine.'

He has never enviously eyed the Range Rover-driving medical colleagues with chalets at the snow. 'I've known for a very long time that that's got nothing to do with one's happiness,' he says. 'I've never felt troubled by that. I increasingly have moments in time these days when I just sit down and think I am happier than I've ever been in my life. I might be sitting having a beer at the end of the day, I might be with someone I really care for and there's a bit of conversation and I think, "It doesn't get any better than this." '

'He could be driving a BMW and living in an upmarket suburb, but he lives the life of almost a pauper,' says Marshall Perron, who was chief minister of the Northern Territory for seven years. 'He doesn't have flash suits, he lives out of a suitcase and he is more likely to be found at the bedside of one of his patients than any other doctor I've ever heard about.'

As a conservative, Mr Perron did not share Dr Nitschke's politics, but despite the campaigner being 'a thorn in the side of my government', he came to have a deep respect for him.

'He regularly sees people at the end of their lives and that takes a toll on you,' Mr Perron says. 'Philip handles that situation then does a press conference. The fact that he is still completely rational, hasn't lost his cool or had a breakdown – a lot of people under less pressure than Philip simply give up.'

The drama in Philip Nitschke's life started early. He was 'dragged all over rural South Australia' as his parents searched for 'better circumstances'. He went to five high schools in five years. His occasionally volatile youth – he once performed a citizen's arrest, holding a man at gunpoint for attempting to steal a radio out of his car – set a pugnacious tone for his various battles. He is a product of a belief system that has driven him since his first year of university when he almost overnight reversed his views from supporting Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War to vehemently opposing it. Since then he has been a political animal, whether it's been anti-war, anti-nuclear or pro-euthanasia.

His mother, 81-year-old Gwen Nitschke, today says her son had always been a fighter and had given up a lot for his beliefs. 'It's probably a little bit of the Irish in him,' she says from her Adelaide home. 'He has a cause to fight. He's had several during his life – Vietnam, the nuclear movement, now this. He's paid for it emotionally, financially and every other way. He's gone his own way; has since he was little.'

She has long resigned herself to her son's peripatetic life and while it's sad they live so far apart, she is used to it. 'I used to try to keep up with him on his mobile phone but I felt I was interrupting his work sometimes. So I ring less now.'

His supporters and critics are equally passionate in their views about him. Last week, with Nancy Crick's death in the headlines, a man in Canberra approached him and said, 'You are evil.'

But Sandy Williamson, the 54-year-old Melbourne woman and former New Yorker who suffers motor-neurone disease and has said she will take her own life on 4 July, American Independence Day, says Dr Nitschke has been there when it mattered.

'When I knew I was going to die – and I know how horrible

this disease is because my husband's uncle died of it – I was desperate to get help and advice and support. In a wilderness of people either not wanting to talk about it or trying to talk me out of it, he was a sane, decent, humane man who was doing his best to help people out.'

Sandy Williamson is talking from her bed, from which she cannot move. 'The thing that I was most concerned about was that if I botched the job I would wake up strapped to a bed in a psychiatric ward and then I would be trapped,' she says.

Marshall Perron talks about Nitschke's ability to cope and absorb stress. 'He has what you would call vicious enemies,' Mr Perron says. 'He is a man who can take extraordinary pressure. Not many of us walk around the country with as many people who oppose what you do as Philip does.'

Dr Nitschke's use of the media has sometimes come under attack. He is unapologetic, and explains his media strategies. 'Someone like Sandy Williamson comes along and you go off and ring up *60 Minutes* and [people] say, "What the hell are you doing? You're just exploiting the patient." But when Sandy comes along and says, "I really want to do something," I try to put my mind to see what best matches her story, what's the best way to get that out to the largest number of people.

'I've had two examples [of people willing to talk to the media]. Two vastly different people. You had Nancy Crick – who was like the woman next door, the battler, the barmaid from the back blocks – and straightaway you could see this is a person whose story would have immense appeal when they see what this woman is up against. Then you have Sandy – articulate, from the other side of the tracks, much younger. They both want to effect change. They are caught in this position and they are angry with the law and they say, "How can I change this?" '

Dr Nitschke had the idea that Crick could write an Internet diary. 'She was interested in the Internet and I thought a diary is quirky and it will attract interest because of the fact it's got that slightly unusual style,' he says. 'The idea was to try and set up some means whereby people would get to know her so that when she did die they would have this kind of pre-knowledge of her.

'Sandy was different. The best way to get people to know her was to make use of rather more orthodox means – *60 Minutes*.'

Dr Nitschke can come across in the media as a cold, self-serving evangelist. But Tristan Pawsey believes her partner has been misjudged. 'It's partly because he has a very blunt way of speaking.' And, she says, he's not as tough as he appears. 'I wouldn't say it leaves him unaffected. I've been on the phone many times when he has been in tears.'

As the businessmen wind up their late lunch on the other side of the cafe, Dr Nitschke hits the mobile. Tonight, he'll get on a plane. He spends his life criss-crossing the country. Asked if he ever feels a sense of peace, he tells a story.

'I was by myself, sitting there, the sun was setting, I had a beer. I had to start doing a lot the next day, but right then there wasn't much to do. I was just sitting there looking at what's left of the jungle and a couple of wallabies were bouncing around on the block; they often are. As the sun was setting I had that very strong feeling that it doesn't matter if you die today. What's it matter? It's not as if you're striving to get any happier.'

*June 2002*

*Philip Nitschke continues his campaign for euthanasia. In 2004 Nitschke and a team of advisers announced they had developed a pill they claim can provide a peaceful, reliable and legal death. Nitschke*

*told reporters that pressure to develop the pill had been relentless since the world's first voluntary euthanasia law was overturned in the Northern Territory. Soon after this article was published, Philip Nitschke and Tristan Pawsey ended their relationship.*

# Richard Butler

Tasmania's Government House, a neo-Gothic 73-room sandstone pile 10 minutes out of Hobart central, is a most serene venue for a political storm. There is a ballroom, a moat, stone gargoyles and a remarkable view over the Derwent River, which today is seen through a light, misty rain. Standing on the steps of the forecourt, where the horse-drawn coaches would once pull up, is a strange feeling – part-Brideshead, part-Hornblower, part-Merchant Ivory. The surroundings are strangely incongruous with Richard Butler, the former diplomat who once said that not having an Australian as head of state bordered on 'self-loathing'.

The governor is in. We have arrived a few minutes early, just in time to watch Richard Butler farewell a group of schoolchildren. 'Famous for being Mary Donaldson's old high school,' he says.

Our official greeting will happen a few minutes later when a uniformed aide-de-camp escorts us into Governor Butler's office for his first extensive interview in the role. He is wearing a navy suit and black RM Williams boots. He pours iced water for us and speaks for nearly two hours. The quietness of life on the hill – he lives here with his third wife and her 17-year-old son – is interrupted only by the delicate bell-like hourly chime of a clock.

Which is not to say his new life is without sound and fury. Or relentless gossip. In Tasmania, everybody's got a Richard Butler story. Especially Richard Butler. He's got heaps of them. Some are about the caning he says he and his wife, Jennifer, are getting from the local newspaper (it is, he says, traducing, trashing, beating up and never running the nice stuff about him; he would know: he ordered a content analysis of the Tasmanian media by his office). Or they are about the whispering campaign out of Canberra, the people he claims to be 'interested in bringing me down'.

After the high-octane world of international diplomacy (he served at Australian embassies in Singapore, Bonn, Paris, Bangkok and New York and for two years was chairman of the UN Special Commission on Iraqi Disarmament, UNSCOM) with its supersonic egos, battle-hardened diplomats and delicate manoeuvrings, the new life of Richard Butler might have been a life of cocktail parties, low-key speeches and hosting dignitaries and schoolchildren.

Instead, since he was sworn in last October, his tenure has been a carnival of anecdotes, accusations (some true), bitter political division (his enemies among senior Tasmanian Liberals are singing like canaries and loving it), rumours (some confirmed) and poor judgments by the governor.

Searching for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq must seem like a picnic compared with his life as Tasmania's favourite

'good copy governor', as one observer called him. The Butlers are Tasmania's greatest soap opera, and the people can't get enough of them.

The couple in the leading role, though, are angry. Judging by his comments, his body language and the fury that rises in his throat when addressing some of what's gone on, the governor is a man, right now, in some pain.

He doesn't look forward to getting the papers. 'It's not a happy business to wake up each morning and think, "Well, what are they going to be saying about us today?"'

As we are leaving, his wife, Dr Jennifer Butler, enters the room and we are introduced. There is a handshake, a short greeting and not another word. Clearly, any charm offensives are reserved for the Tasmanian public. She does not say so, but Dr Butler (who originally decided to call herself Associate Professor Butler, then switched to 'Dr') is known to be hurt, angry and confused about their chilly reception in Tasmania.

Her husband says as much. 'One of the things that has surprised us about Tasmania is the extent of gossip,' he says. 'It's interesting. Gossip exists elsewhere. Jennifer lived in the hills of Thailand for 10 years in a village in a dirt-floored bamboo-walled hut as she helped those people not use opium and not get HIV-AIDS and not have their kids go into the sex industry. She speaks Thai and has lived village life. And she says even in those villages where everyone knows what everyone does, the degree of inaccuracy isn't as large as we have encountered here.'

They are hoping for a better second year. 'It's not been as happy as Jennifer and I had hoped it to be. It's been difficult and many in the community know that. People keep coming to us in Salamanca Place and saying, "Please stay." Really. We're not going to go anywhere.'

Is it worth it? 'I'm trying hard to make it worth it,' he says.

* * *

What is it about the governor that provokes such intense reaction? To begin answering that, you have to go back to what many regarded as a bizarre appointment, a huge risk on both sides.

After years of diplomatic service, including four years on the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, which ended in 2003, Richard Butler found himself on the speaking circuit and writing on international politics.

He wanted a full-time job. There was a vacancy in Tasmania. 'And I like Tasmania,' says Butler. 'I like the idea of this, if you like, neglected or underdog part of Australia getting up on its two feet, four feet, in a new way.'

Tasmania's Labor Premier, Jim Bacon, now struggling with inoperable lung cancer, had high hopes. He asked Butler to take the position, knowing Butler was a committed republican (Butler once said it was 'hideously damaging' to Australia's psyche to have Her Majesty as head of state).

Butler says he thought about it for two months, ran it past a couple of respected friends, and then accepted. He recognised the in-built potential for accusations of hypocrisy, but, he says, Bacon reassured him. 'My initial reaction was to say to him, "But, Jim, I'm a republican," and he said to me, "And so am I – aren't we all, modern Australians?" '

Butler felt Bacon had been persuasive. Announcing the appointment, Bacon claimed Butler's 'influence, standing and knowledge of the international community will bring benefits to Tasmania'. He said it was 'symbolic of the new Tasmania'.

With the obvious charge of hypocrisy, and with his long Labor Party affiliation (he once worked for Gough Whitlam and in recent years has been a strong critic of the prime minister and Coalition), his enemies prepared to attack.

Not one day passed before things turned sour. He was

sworn in on 3 October last year. The couple got married the next day at Government House (he was previously married to former Hawke government minister Susan Ryan and the American-born Barbara Evans, and has two grown-up children, Justine and Ben). Tasmanians cracked bad-taste jokes about them having a good wedding reception venue. The talk was that Butler had acquiesced to conservative Tasmanian sensibilities. The truth, Butler says, is different. 'I married Jennifer on the first day I could, and that was determined by my divorce becoming absolute on the previous day. That was between her and my heart. I wanted to say to her, whom I love very deeply, that I will marry you the minute I can, and that's what motivated it.'

Immediately after the swearing-in, the couple went on a three-week honeymoon. It was not a great signal to send. 'I asked Jim Bacon could I get married, have my honeymoon, and be sworn in,' he says now. 'He said, "No, you must be sworn in on the third of October because the Constitution required there be a governor and the other governor had gone." It was not my preference.'

Just three days into the job, *The Mercury* revealed leaked emails from staff at Singapore Airlines showing Butler had made a fuss at Sydney and Singapore when his requests for an upgrade were denied. One email said that Butler had 'created a scene in Sydney and Singapore by insisting he be upgraded because he is the governor of Tasmania'. Butler admits that through his travel agent the upgrade was requested, but says, 'That story was beaten up greatly.'

But beat-ups or not, trouble seemed to follow him. With his critics on alert because of Butler's strong affiliation with Labor – just a month before accepting the job as governor, he called for the resignation of Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Defence Minister Robert Hill over their handling of

intelligence before the Iraq war – Butler held a private meeting with Federal Labor leader Mark Latham.

The Latham meeting led to rumours that Butler had asked Latham for a position in a Labor government if Latham won. Butler and Latham later denied this.

But the flurry of smaller eyebrow-raisers paled when Butler gave a speech to 100 businesspeople – part of a group called the Corporate Tower Club – at Hobart's Wrest Point Casino, in which he described the administration of George W Bush as 'the most highly nationalistic and self-centred government we have known' and claimed that President Bush reserves the right to 'beat the living daylights' out of anyone he doesn't like under the cover of the threat of terrorism.

The speech made international headlines and caused Premier Paul Lennon, who had taken over from Jim Bacon, to issue an unprecedented public gag on the governor. Butler was ordered to stop commenting on foreign or domestic policy immediately. 'I expect this undertaking to be strictly adhered to,' the premier said.

Many Tasmanians were surprised that their governor would jump so vigorously into politics, and some expressed concern that a small state could ill afford to offend a major trading partner. Tasmanian Federal Liberal Senator Eric Abetz says, 'I had to hose down a couple of people calling for his resignation. My view was "let's move forward positively and put it behind us."'

But the trouble didn't go away. And critics in Tasmania weren't confined to Liberals. Federal Labor MP Harry Quick said, 'I think he is a political animal and he's finding it very hard in Tasmania, well away from the international excitement.'

If the nature of Butler's speech caused concern, so did his reaction immediately after giving it. Margaretta Pos is a reporter with *The Mercury* who covered the speech. On

introducing herself to the governor after it, Pos said Butler told her, 'This is a private meeting and I want your guarantee that nothing I said today will appear tomorrow.'

Back at the office there was a message waiting for her to call the governor. 'I've got an apology for you,' he told her. 'I now realise a media advisory had gone out and you were perfectly entitled to be there.'

That was the end of his conciliatory tone. 'He obviously knew he was in trouble,' says Pos. She says Butler then launched into a half-hour 'harangue' about 'what I was going to do to them'.

'He said, "What are you going to write?" I said, "I'm going to write what you said." "What headline are you going to write?" "I don't write the headlines." "So you're absolving yourself of responsibility. Can I expect to see myself plastered all over the front page?" "I don't place the stories." '

'I was staggered,' Pos says. 'You'd think he'd have better things to do.'

Today, Butler insists he believed the speech to be 'off the record'. He says the journalist was not present for his whole speech, which Pos denies. 'The whole thing was a mess,' Butler says.

For Butler to believe that such incendiary comments would remain private after he made them in front of 100 business-people was widely regarded as naive. And did he believe it was strange to embark on that conversation with the journalist? 'Perhaps it's naive folly on my part, but I believe that public discourse in a democracy is really important,' Butler says now.

Butler remaining mute was always going to be difficult. 'I've been trying to push the edges of what a governor can say on matters of social importance,' he says. 'I don't believe I've crossed constitutional lines. Some people have suggested I might have become a bit too political. I have, in my attempt

to modernise this job, decided to say some things about matters of social policy, which have caused some people some agitation.'

He says, 'I've taken careful note of what [Premier Lennon] said and I will obviously take that into account in the future. I do not propose to break the constitutional rules in relation to this office. I continue to believe that this job can be done in a modern, creative way, and that will include addressing issues of public importance and concern.

'What I must be careful to do is not do that in a way that can be construed as simply partisan. Of course, it's a fine line and it takes great skill to work it out.'

Judging from talkback ABC radio at the time, many Tasmanians agreed with Butler's stance in the speech on the US but questioned the methods. Peg Putt, leader of Tasmania's Greens, says, 'He was criticised for a speech pointing out what any teacher of international relations would tell you. The governor should not be politically partisan, but you couldn't expect a man of his background not to address issues of international significance relating to that background.'

At Parliament House in Hobart, I asked Premier Lennon for an interview. When told the subject, he declined, saying, 'Richard Butler hasn't done anything wrong.'

The Lennon censure was regarded as an extraordinary act by a premier towards a governor. It meant Tasmanians were on Butler-watch. 'Butler's come down here with an international career champing at the bit to talk about Iraq,' says Greg Barns, a political columnist with *The Mercury*. 'He goes to Hobart Rotary meetings and talks about international politics – there's a disconnect[ion] there.'

Barns says Lennon's censure has set the tone for Butler's tenure. 'He's now become an object of curiosity, which has undermined his capacity to do the job well. People are waiting

for his next naughty act. He adds colour and movement to a place that can sometimes be a bit inward-looking and dull.'

However hard he tried to be the dignified governor, Butler couldn't catch a break. In April, a Keystone Kops-type incident involving a freelance photographer again put Butler in the gossip columns. As the Butlers left the grounds of Government House to go shopping, the photographer Matt Newton, who was freelancing for *The Australian* and had been waiting for a picture, followed, according to Butler, 'doing a wheelie'. Concerned by being tailed, Butler pulled up at a police station. 'By the purest piece of luck there was a senior police officer coming out of the building. I leaned out of the car and said, "I'm the governor; this fellow is following us; would you like to take care of him?" They did stop him and interviewed him.'

'Tasmania,' says Greens leader Peg Putt, 'is a small pond where everybody knows what the big fish are doing.' Which is why the Butlers are so visible. Every reception they attend, every comment they throw off, is noted and passed on. Outside one function, the governor was asked what he thought of the recently announced Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the US. According to Tasmanian Liberal Senator Guy Barnett, Butler said, 'These bastards [the Australian Government] have done nothing for us [Tasmania].'

The comment was a gift for those who believe Butler remains a Labor warrior and who harbour concerns about his role as an umpire in the case of a constitutional crisis, which Tasmanians have seen before. 'I don't resile from that for a moment,' Butler says of the comment. 'We haven't got to the precious situation in this country, surely, where in that context one can't speak like that.'

Butler's attempts to 'modernise' the role have met with mixed receptions. Many talkback callers in the days after the

Wrest Point speech spoke of Butler as a breath of fresh air eschewing the traditional vice-regal caution on contemporary topics.

Lindsay Tuffin, this year the recipient of Tasmanian Journalist of the Year, runs a maverick website of political and social commentary called tasmaniantimes.com. Tuffin received his award from Butler, who that night gave what was said to be a good speech on the increasing triviality in the media. 'There's a paradox,' says Tuffin, 'in that the journalism he is calling for more of has embarrassed him enormously.'

But Tuffin, who says of Butler, 'we're both into Beethoven and red wine', admires the governor for speaking out. 'There is the sense that he may be helping redefine this anachronistic role of governor by his very public image,' he says. 'I think that's a good thing. I'm a great believer in freedom of expression rather than being muzzled by control freaks, of which we have too many in Tasmania.'

Others, though, chafed against the pace of change. Butler declined to be the patron of St John Ambulance – a small act perhaps, but it upset those who believed the governor should not 'cherry-pick' whom he supports. 'They wrote me a letter that I found preposterous in the 21st century, namely that I should be inducted, some pretentious word like that, a deputy prior of the order of St John of Jerusalem,' said Butler. 'I would have had to put on a black coat and a floppy hat and so on. I said I was not prepared to be part of this. Part of the modernisation of this job is that I'm not going to go around in a black cloak with a Teutonic cross on it.'

He also reportedly angered war veterans by apparently refusing to wear a poppy during an Anzac Day ceremony. He now denies this, explaining there weren't any poppies available. He did not explain why he didn't source a poppy in time for the service. University of Tasmania's Professor Peter

Boyce, an expert on the vice-regal office, wrote, 'There seems to be an element of naivety or insensitivity in the governor's handling of the office.'

Relations with the more conservative residents of Tasmania sank even lower when, under a large newspaper headline 'Butler snub', it was reported that, apparently due to Butler being too 'high-profile' and 'controversial', the RSL had voted against inviting him to be its patron. Today, RSL president Ian Kennett says the vote was not related to Butler. 'The RSL's really embarrassed about that,' Butler comments. 'They've not always had the governor as their patron. It's not automatic. They decided not to have a patron.'

'There are people who prefer the old ways. I've had to respectfully come to terms with that,' Butler says. 'There's no point in trying to beat people into submission. We've had to trim things a little bit to take account of long-standing views and attitudes and sensitivities within Tasmania.'

No aspect of the Butlers' lives was deemed unworthy of analysis. It was reported the vice-regal couple had moved into what is known as The Royal Suite, usually reserved for Queen Elizabeth. Butler now says, 'I reject the notion that there is a Royal Suite. That's a beat-up. This is what the papers have tried to imply, that there is a specifically holy, reserved place for Her Majesty the Queen. We decided to live at that end of the building for the very simple reason that the bedroom has a bathroom attached to it.'

His public appearances have been scoured for potential missteps. Political commentator Professor Richard Herr says, '. . . [Lennon's rebuke] . . . made governor-watching a sport.'

In a story that has become famous in Tasmania, Butler, due to attend a function in Launceston for the National Trust, two hours' drive from Hobart, declined on the grounds that he

had an 'urgent' personal matter to attend to. Later that evening, he attended a classical music concert in Hobart. A spokeswoman for the National Trust was 'surprised, certainly'.

Butler now takes the blame. 'That event was mismanaged and it was my fault,' he says. Butler had 'urgent' personal business to do, which was completed by 6 p.m. He then attended the concert by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. 'I should have understood that I should have stayed home because by going out that night it was left open to the interpretation that I simply couldn't be bothered making the trip to their function but I was quite happy to go out to a concert [in Hobart].'

The glare on the Butlers has not dimmed. Even what should have been a good-news story for Tasmania – the wedding of Mary Donaldson – became another public relations headache when it was announced an extra $50,000 travel allowance would be added to the $134,000 allocated for travel expenses so the Butlers could attend the wedding.

Dr Butler, a social anthropologist who is a former director of the Drugs Program Bureau in the New South Wales Health Department, seems still to be working out her role as a modern governor's wife. While the taxpayers fund Butler's $334,000 salary, budget estimates revealed last week that Dr Butler was paid $46,500 for six months' work on a health-related project at the University of Tasmania.

She also speaks at functions without her husband. Last month, she addressed a Women of Agriculture event where 250 women gathered 'to hear her talk about everything, including the wedding', according to Richard Butler. 'She got a standing ovation.'

In January she talked to *The Mercury* about her new vice-regal life: 'You still do all the normal things – making a cup of tea or wandering from room to room in your dressing gown. But you don't do it alone. There are always people around

you.' She spoke of 'power-walking around the gardens with my headphones on'.

But Dr Butler has had her own battles with public relations. Some have found her vigorous personal style challenging, especially in contrast with her demure predecessor, Lady Green. There is talk of a 'two-for-the-price-of-one' role in the mould of Hillary Clinton.

In March, the Butlers toured a housing commission suburb near Hobart. At the lunch, Dr Butler reportedly talked about her vision for the area. 'Jennifer was starting to lecture everybody,' said one local councillor. 'It was like she was back at uni dealing with a bunch of 20-year-old spotty students. It was the first time she'd been there.'

So why this antipathy towards the vice-regal couple? Some say it stems from the sharp contrast between Butler and his low-key predecessor, Sir Guy Green. Others believe he brought too much political baggage to the job. Judy Tierney, the former veteran Tasmanian correspondent for the ABC's *7.30 Report* says, 'I think he has quite a lot to offer Tasmania, but he is a new breed and I think there is a great reluctance to accept the new breed.

'Some of the criticisms have been misguided and small-minded,' says Tasmanian Federal Labor member Duncan Kerr. 'He's had the misfortune of being the tallest poppy in the vase. There's no doubt he's been the subject of deliberate attack. The local Tasmanian community, as far as I can judge from talkback, has warmed to him.'

His battle with *The Mercury*, part of the News Ltd stable, continues. 'We have to conclude that they are not interested in reporting on us factually and certainly not felicitously,' he says. He mentions a report about his recent trip to London where he met the Queen. 'They did that over really sardonically from a correspondent in London. The whole thing was

traduced, trashed in a way that relied on material that was not factual.'

Butler said he recently asked his office to analyse six months' of media coverage of the Butlers, the results of which have now been tabulated. 'It shows very clearly that of the three newspapers in the state, two of them have written a moderate amount about us – 75 per cent positive, 25 per cent negative.

'One newspaper, *The Mercury* again, doesn't meet those criteria. *The Mercury* has written vastly more about us, and overwhelmingly their stories are negative.' *Mercury* editor Garry Bailey says, 'We have been reporting on him accurately.'

Butler talks about disturbing reports from Canberra. 'I have been informed that there are people in Canberra who are quite interested in trying to bring me down. I have been told by several good, credible sources from Canberra that there was an interest in some circles in trying to get me brought down or removed from this job. I know it to be true. I think they may have started to back off now.'

Asked whether he and Dr Butler had questioned whether they wanted to continue to put up with the scrutiny, he said, 'We have found the gossip disappointing. We've found [the] "living in the fishbowl" thing a bit tiresome.'

He said, 'The letter says you're appointed for five years but that's at the pleasure of the Queen. I have no intention of going anywhere, OK? People come to us and say, "You're doing a wonderful job, you're fresh air, we like it, it's good that you gave opinions, please stay."'

'The other thing I find in a lot of the media commentary is an abiding theme in Australian public life, that people in public service can get greedy, or are greedy – that you are only doing it so you can live in that big house. I came here with open eyes knowing the so-called creature comforts are nothing

compared to the loss of privacy, the loss of individual freedom. This form of public service comes at a fairly high price. My wife and I will continue to pay it because we believe in it.'

Public life has had its costs before. In 1992 Butler was the subject of allegations of sexual harassment by a junior stenographer at the Australian embassy in Bangkok. Butler has always vigorously denied the allegations. 'I can look you in the eye and tell you they were absolutely without substance,' he says now.

During our interview, Butler seemed, by the detail he went into without objection, willing to elaborate on the many reports about him, some true and some, as he explained, untrue. These incidents have caused him concern, and were legitimate areas of inquiry. And yet, two days after our interview, *The Sunday Age* received a letter from a Sydney firm of solicitors, M Rosenblum and Co, representing him. The firm, wrote Rupert Rosenblum, had been 'instructed to write to you on his behalf'.

In the letter, Rosenblum writes: 'Since the conversation you had with him, our client has received reports about the methods and types of some of the inquiries you have been carrying out in Tasmania.' In Melbourne and then in Hobart, *The Sunday Age* made a number of phone calls and met with several people in researching this article.

Rosenblum then writes of 'your pursuit of gossip and insignificant trivia' during the interview. He is referring to the same material which Butler conceded had dogged his first eight months in the role, caused him and his wife stress and unhappiness – and which he seemed keen to address.

'He should have a media adviser of his own,' says Tania Ewing, author of his 2000 biography *The Peace Broker*, 'and if he had, many of these incidents would have been diffused.'

*June 2004*

*After he resigned as governor, 10 weeks after this interview, Richard Butler stayed in Tasmania because his son was still in school. In December 2004, Butler gave an interview to ABC's Classic FM in which he said a media campaign had ended his tenure. 'There was a time when in August the Premier [Paul Lennon] of Tasmania came to me and said, "My advice to you . . . is to offer your resignation". He said, "I want to emphasise to you, Richard, that you have done nothing wrong. But I must ask you to resign because of the media campaign that is being waged against you. My assessment is that it's being harmful and it will continue."' Butler says he accepted the advice because he was a republican who believed in democracy. He admitted, 'There were some things that I think I probably could have done better.'*

# Steve Price

Enough, already, with the short jokes. Steve Price, the news and current affairs director of Melbourne's all-conquering radio station 3AW, is, at 162 centimetres (five feet four inches), indeed a diminutive man, but why is his height the first thing people evoke at the mention of his name? 'Poison dwarf' (Sam Newman), 'vertically impaired' (Paul Barber), 'since AW hit number one he's walking taller, figuratively speaking' (Newman again), 'angry ant' (anonymous), and a man who 'when I met him I thought he was suffering from LMS (Little Man's Syndrome)' (Rex Hunt).

And they're just his friends.

But leaving aside his height for a moment, slagging Steve Price needs to be organised a little. Perhaps his detractors could take a number and wait to be called. There's plenty of

time for everybody. The crowd should get the short jokes over first, then move on to the alleged Machiavellian reasons why he sacked a brace of well-known radio personalities. Then, when that's all done, they can grit their teeth and begrudgingly admit that he's done an OK job by taking 3AW to the top of the cut-throat radio industry.

Sure, he nurtured Rex Hunt when people wanted to strangle him in the commentary box, but the Coodabeen Champions were ready-made from 3RRR. OK, it was smart to put Philip Brady and Bruce Mansfield on at night, and yes, they've cleaned up. But he's still 'stomped his way to the top' (former AW personality Murray Nicoll). OK, *Lawyers, Guns and Money* was a great get from 3RRR, via 3AK, an inspired move, but 'he's very insecure because he really hasn't done anything' (Ian McMinn). And, according to John Hindle, 'He's taking credit for ratings he would have got anyway.'

Welcome to the murky world of commercial radio, which has inspired all these unworthy thoughts. Behind the cheerful, authoritative voices at 3AW is, according to those who have worked there, a radio station that engenders a 'paranoid siege mentality where you can't trust anybody' (Ian McMinn). Steve Price rules this world, which Steve Price will gladly remind you. Asked to describe his actual title on air with Paul Barber, he said, 'Just call me the king of Melbourne radio.'

3AW, in the doldrums after the heady days of Derryn Hinch, is back on top. At the last radio survey, it beat FOX-FM by 0.5 per cent. It is the talk of the town, and the politicians know it. Paul Keating once said that if you talk to John Laws, you talk to middle Australia. In Melbourne, 3AW is the preferred option for the premier, Jeff Kennett, and the leader of the Opposition. Neil Mitchell's morning show is the chosen venue for Kennett once a week, during which he

takes talkback. John Brumby, not to be left out, does the same gig with Paul Barber in the afternoon.

Steve Price must be credited, to a large degree, with getting 3AW where it is. When he took over as program director in 1989, AW was rating an overall figure for Monday to Friday of 9.8. Now it's 15.9.

Price came in and restructured the whole station, most significantly moving Mitchell from drive to mornings, where he is now king. Then he snatched Paul Barber from producing Steve Vizard's *Tonight Live* to do drive, in which he took number-one position at the last survey, and beefed up the football coverage with Rex Hunt and a cast of 'experts', which included the charmingly dark-humoured Sam Newman. It is a mix that has worked.

In Price's hands now are the fates of some of Melbourne's biggest broadcast names with this town's most gargantuan egos: Mitchell, Barber, the Coodabeens, Ross Stevenson, Dean Banks and Rex Hunt, for whom the much-used description 'larger than life' is finally accurate. Hunt, 'the biggest thing that's happened to football' according to Sam Newman, is surely Price's most impressive trophy.

Credit where it's due? 'Sheer arse,' says Murray Nicoll, former AW personality and now with ABC radio in Adelaide.

On a coffee table in Price's office is a book called *Coping With Difficult Bosses*. Price at one stage proudly displayed a line of coffee mugs that once belonged to the people he'd sacked, like a row of hunter's trophies. He wants to laminate for the wall a quote by Groucho Marx: 'The secret of life is honesty and fair dealing. If you can fake that you've got it made.'

There's a Steve Price hotline, which only he has access to, and when it glows red it means the boss is on the line, often

from his mobile. 'I ring in and say, "For Christ's sake, go to an ad break, or tell Margaret [Fletcher] to shut up." Some of the younger producers are a bit nervous when it rings.'

Nobody has ever heard of most radio executives, but Price, 38, is a new breed: executive as celebrity. He gets on the air himself when his former *Herald* boss Neil Mitchell is ill, and wants his own show. He even hits the road for the station, most recently filing from the building containing the porn video store that Bob Hawke bought, and from the Adelaide Grand Prix.

The ostentatious trappings of his undoubted power invoke the days of the feared Hollywood mogul: the best of friends and the best of enemies. And he thoroughly enjoys the power-broking, anti-hero self-definition.

When I rang to arrange an interview, Price suggested, 'No one's interested in me'. Gently pressed, he then asked whether I'd like to ring some people about him. 'Let's see. Murray Nicoll. He's suing me. Denis Donohue, he hates my guts. John Hindle, he hates me for sacking him. Try Harry Beitzel. Ross Campbell. Hal Todd. He's dead, but he blames me for killing him.'

Why is it that Price elicits such passionate responses? Price sighs. 'Radio drags people's egos right up to the surface because they have to parade their emotions in front of a big audience,' he says, 'and most of these people don't turn off when they leave the studio. So they have to go and get half-pissed at lunch and get into each other.'

As a tough-guy journalist of the old school (his proudest scoop was sleeping in the bed of the crime boss Robert Trimbole in Ireland) Price would know a thing or two about lunch. He started his career at the *Adelaide News*. He had no ambition for journalism. He'd done badly at school, dropping out in year 11, and his father clipped an advertisement for a

job as a copy boy. 'I never thought I'd be a great writer,' he says. 'I wanted to be an A-grade reporter.'

When he left Adelaide ('It was too small') for Melbourne, he was hired by *The Herald* and worked at police rounds where the 'tough guys' went. It was a macho environment at *The Herald* (women were not permitted to wear trousers to work), which suited the aggressive Price just fine. 'We always described people at *The Age* as yoghurt-eating bike riders.'

But in that un-yoghurt-like environment, Price saw himself as something of a dandy. A *Herald* chief of staff said to him once, 'What's this sport jacket? Where's your suit?'

Price responded, 'This sports jacket cost me $400, which is more than I can say for that $99 Del Monti job you've got on.'

Geoff Slattery was a former colleague of Price's at *The Herald* and, as sports editor, watched Price, the hard news man, 'agonise' as Eric Beecher remade it, under new owner Rupert Murdoch, into what Price calls 'guides to croissant-eating in South Yarra'.

Slattery admires Price's determination and likes his roughness. He sees Price as ambitious, hard-working and a typical South Australian, the view being that South Australians have a big chip on their shoulders and have to work harder to prove themselves in the big cities. 'One idea worked and then the rest followed,' Slattery says.

Price developed his journalism at a rough time. 'At *The Herald* we were always losers, losing circulation, and no matter how good a job you did, you knew it was going to shut down. We always thought of ourselves as being unlucky to be there because it was never going to help us achieve greatness.'

Greatness, in Price's eyes, could be achieved in radio, and all the better at a boys' club like 3AW (Margaret Fletcher is its only prime-time woman). Neil Mitchell's appointment as *Herald* editor in 1985 was the beginning of Mitchell and

Price's long and close relationship. Mitchell left the paper when Rupert Murdoch bought it in 1987, and came to 3AW that year to do the drive shift. Price followed six months later as his producer.

His arrival immediately caused resentment when Price and Mitchell formed a power bloc which excluded everyone else. 'We were just given the cold shoulder,' says Murray Nicoll. 'Even back then they were a law unto themselves. I've not encountered such an unpleasant working atmosphere, except the Murdoch papers, which is where Price comes from.'

'[We] were seen as the interlopers, the newspaper boys who didn't know anything about radio,' Price says. 'When I started I was certainly a lot more aggressive and probably a bit painful. We probably had a better opinion of ourselves than was probably earned.'

With his plan to revamp the station, he was always going to make enemies. Under his rule the contracts of Nicoll, Hindle, McMinn, motoring reporter Bill Tuckey and Denis Donohue (formerly of *Lawyers, Guns and Money*) were not renewed. To be let go is one thing, but to have Steve Price do it to you seems to have inspired a degree of vitriol harsh even for the bitchy world of radio.

Ian McMinn has a terrible story. 'It was Christmas 1990 and we were all having a drink at the Celtic Club. Murray Nicoll, who had then been out of work all year, came in. Now, Murray is a relatively harmless type of guy. Murray said, "Merry Christmas," and Price said ". . . it's good he's unemployed." I thought, "Why would someone be so nasty? The guy's lost his job, he's got nowhere to go and he's being sociable, so why say that when he hasn't got any defence?" Murray Nicoll nurses his drink in a Melbourne pub. 'Maybe their way [Price's] is right and we're all wrong [the sacked personalities],' he says, 'but there are plenty of radio stations that

operate without envy, dissension and hate. Creative tension is what it used to be called. Used well, it can be quite effective. Used badly, it destroys people. Still, they are in the black, aren't they?' Price's employees seem to like his style, fully aware at all times, of course, of the rooster/feather duster equation.

Listening to his friends talking about him conjures an image of a bird watching a cobra: fascinated, but too scared to move. 'One of these days my usefulness to him may be outlived,' Barber says. 'Nothing would surprise me. Price would take my job tomorrow if he could.'

The ironies, mythologies and sheer turns of fate in Price's rise are unending. Price was twice Neil Mitchell's underling. Now he's his boss. Luckily, they have retained a good relationship. At the *Adelaide News*, Price was Murray Nicoll's copy boy, picking up Nicoll's dry cleaning and filling his parking meter. When he became Nicoll's boss, it re-affirmed one of journalism's most vital rules: always be nice to the copy boy, he may well be chief of staff one day.

Rex Hunt drops his voice to a low scream when he talks of Price. Hunt, who irritated fellow football commentators for years with his idiosyncratic style and attracted unspectacular ratings, tells a story about the man who stood up for him in a board meeting when 3AW wanted to bring back Harry Beitzel, and Price said if Rex went, he went.

'I have a special spot for him,' Hunt says. 'It would have been easy to go with the flow and get rid of me, but Steven wanted to stick it out. We've become quite strong friends.'

Hunt tells a story about Price sacking someone who was wearing mirrored sunglasses. 'He said he literally watched himself sack this guy and it was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do.'

'I don't like hurting people,' Price says. 'Some of the mythology [surrounding me] arose in that period when I had

to sack a lot of people. You tend to live up to that mythology, or make a smart crack to engender it. They say the same sort of thing about John Sorrell at Channel Nine. But I'm softer now. To be a manager in the '90s you have to be a bit softer.'

The 3AW ship sails smoothly on. Even people who have reason to dislike Price, such as Harry Beitzel, who was overlooked for Rex Hunt, admire his marketing skills. 'He's got a top man in Hunt and he milks that,' Beitzel says. 'When Hunt was up there on the scoreboard on Grand Final day, I just thought, this man never misses an opportunity to push 3AW.'

Price is most likely the most powerful man in Melbourne radio. As such, he has had to develop a bit of a shell to cope with the slings that invariably come his way. Sam Newman believes his ruthless persona 'does not come naturally'. 'I think he finds it personally intimidating to be ruthless, but he does it in spite of himself. In his job you can't afford to be seen as indecisive. And in some obscure way even his detractors would say that's a positive.'

So, Price is still a rooster. At the next ratings he may be a feather duster, although that's unlikely. Until then, he has had to deal with the short jokes. 'People accuse me of having the short person's disease, the assumption that if you are short you kick harder,' Price says. 'Being as short as I am never worried me.'

*December 1993*

*In 2000, Steve Price left Melbourne's 3AW and joined Sydney's 2UE, where he works as its drive-time host.*

# Tony Knox

In a communal kitchen in Brunswick there are two blackboards on the wall, one marked 'Shopping', the other 'Friends/events'. There is a shelf full of spices and an array of heavy pots and terrine dishes, some of which once served in the kitchen of one of Melbourne's finest restaurants. An ancient stove that has cooked its last beef bourguignon sits outside the door, awaiting a trip to the tip.

It's rustic and homely and not at all where you'd expect to find 66-year-old Tony Knox. For nearly 30 years, Knox and his partner, Mietta O'Donnell, were the dapper king and elegant queen of Melbourne hospitality, the celebrated pioneers of a new way of eating out. Now here he is – small, matter-of-fact, an efficient, clipped tone about him – leading us down what 10 years ago was the corridor of an inner-suburban primary school.

Knox and four others rent bedrooms in this converted school (the bedrooms used to be classrooms). 'I think it's one of the more sensible things I've done,' Knox says. 'It's been terrific to be with other people. Having lived by ourselves for 30 years it is a big jump, but I was surprised it didn't seem different or strange. It can be very vexing when I can't get to the dunny, but it's important to have to consider other people occasionally.'

In Knox's room, there's the piano from Mietta's on which he often plays 'badly and loudly'; a laptop on which he updates his restaurant-review website; two huge bookcases containing a vast collection of vinyl records; a table with a half-drunk bottle of red wine; and, on one side of the room, Clifton Pugh's 1986 life-sized portrait of Mietta O'Donnell, a work that once graced the foyer of the couple's famous restaurant Mietta's, in Alfred Place, the laneway off Collins Street at the business end of town. It's appropriate that Mietta dominates this room, as she will always dominate Knox's life.

About 4.30 p.m. on 4 January 2001, Mietta O'Donnell and Tony Knox were travelling in a rented Holden Commodore south of Burnie. The couple were in Tasmania to judge a food-and-wine contest and to update their restaurant guide. It had been a busy day visiting restaurants and they were travelling to more when the car slid in loose gravel and collided with a station wagon driven by a local man, a mechanic named Glen Harman. O'Donnell and Harman were killed. According to one witness at the accident, a badly injured Knox said, 'My God, what have I done?'

Knox was taken to hospital where, confined to a wheelchair, he stayed a week before being transferred to St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne. His daughter, Katherine Knox, flew to

Tasmania to be with him. 'It was beyond anything you could ever imagine,' she says.

How did her father cope? 'He just kept breathing. He grew up in the generation where you survived life by keeping working and keeping going. None of us will ever get over it.'

Today, Knox has only sketchy memories of what happened. 'I'm big on denial,' he says. 'I really don't think particularly about it. The ambos woke me up in the car. They keep telling me I was talking. I don't remember. I couldn't move. I was pretty smashed up on the left-hand side. I wasn't aware of people, particularly.'

He was charged with two counts of causing death by negligent driving, with a possible jail term of 12 months. In May 2002 he was cleared of those charges, but Tasmania's Office of Public Prosecutions appealed. In October 2002, a Tasmanian judge refused an application for a retrial.

For Knox, the public trauma, which dragged on for two years, was over. But the hardest part – living the rest of his life without Mietta – was just beginning.

Tony Knox is sitting at a corner table at the North Fitzroy Star, a pub-restaurant owned by Patricia O'Donnell, Mietta's sister. Friends say Knox is prickly, edgy, volatile, passionate and intense. He will go off like a volcano, they say, but he can also be warm and generous. Right now, though, he is still and quiet and our conversation is sometimes halted by his tears.

He speaks in a subdued staccato style; his friends call it mumbling. He is not known as a great communicator, especially on the topic of himself. 'I'm not a good person on this stuff,' he says. 'My defence mechanism is not to be self-reflective about it.' His way of dealing with things, he adds, is simple,

automatic. 'You just keep going. One foot in front of the other.'

He pauses, then says, 'When you're on top you begin to believe your own bullshit . . . there's so much stuff written about you and you begin to think, "Oh Jesus, I'm great." And then you do something absolutely stupid again and, crunch. So you fall to the bottom.

'They're your most creative times, the only times you make the changes and really do things, when everyone's passed you by. And you know that it's only getting back up again and doing something that matters. Revenge is just getting up again the next day.' Mietta's mother, Maria, walks through the room. Mietta's sister, Patricia, is elsewhere preparing for the day. The spirit of Mietta is everywhere. For 30 years Tony and Mietta were rarely apart. Time heals? 'Time passes,' he says. 'Your life's not great, ever.'

In the early 1950s, Tony Knox was an energetic teenager – riding horses, playing tennis – with no real idea of where life might take him. The Knox family had moved from Heidelberg to Eltham, where his father, the celebrated environmental architect Alistair Knox, developed a reputation for building environmentally sensitive mud-brick houses. For a teenager, it was a wonderful place to grow up. 'I spent a lot of time barefoot running across those very hard gravelly Eltham roads,' he says.

Knox became involved in his father's building, helping with the joinery at the back of their property. 'I got to drive a truck, which was great until I left a house hanging over the Heidelberg Bridge into the river.'

In 1954, when Knox was 16, his mother, working at the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Fitzroy, was crossing Brunswick Street when she was hit by a car and killed. 'I answered the phone when the police rang at 10 o'clock at night,' he says.

His father and mother had separated and Alistair had taken up with another woman, 'my wicked stepmother', Tony remembers, who moved in after his mother's death. Relations between father and son were tense. Betty Burstall, mother of the actor-producer Tom, and a neighbour at the time, says, 'I remember tennis games where Tony and his father would have these shouting matches.'

At 23, Knox was 'forced out into the wide cruel world'. He moved to Carlton and married a young teacher named Pat Dowley. The couple travelled to England and did the bohemian thing. 'We bought a £40 "banger" and drove to Kathmandu just before the hippie trail started.'

On their return, they bought a junk shop in Lygon Street, Carlton, called The Poppy Shop, where Knox spent five years. 'I used to go to Joel's and buy junk. Once I filled the entire back of my Holden ute with frames I bought from Joel's for $14. One picture we sold to a gallery for enough to buy a deposit on our first house, a little Fred McCubbin. Bought it for five cents, got $1500 for it.'

The Poppy Shop was a centre for coffee, gossip and ideas, too. A friend, Ann Polis, told Knox she wanted to get a group of like-minded people together to take over *The Carlton News*, a news sheet run by local traders that came out every six months. The paper's mission would be to fight the Housing Commission's plans to extend, inappropriately they felt, the high-rise flats across vast tracts of Carlton.

They set themselves up and changed the name to *The Melbourne Times*. Polis told Knox that he 'couldn't write an English sentence', so he took photographs for the paper and brought with him a 'manic energy'. But his infamous temper became intolerable to the others and he was forced out. 'I can become incredibly irritating after a while,' he confesses. 'They finally had to get rid of me. I was impatient and dictatorial.'

By the early 1970s, Knox and his wife had split. Knox had heard from a friend about a shy but determined young journalist called Mietta O'Donnell, and 'how terrific she was'. One night at Jimmy Watson's bar in Lygon Street, they met. Six months later, they were an item.

O'Donnell had grown up around food and restaurants, spending many childhood hours at Mario's, her grandfather's restaurant in Exhibition Street in the city, a magnet for Melbourne's bohemian and theatre crowds. A solicitor friend wanted to find a property to buy and rent out and asked Knox to find him something. Knox came up with an old butcher's shop in Brunswick Street, North Fitzroy, almost opposite the old Fitzroy football oval, which he thought would be great for a restaurant. When he showed it to Mietta, she agreed, and a decision to start a restaurant was made quickly.

In June 1974, Mietta's opened its doors to a Melbourne not used to gastronomic adventure. The menu, 'drawn from the four corners of the world', changed weekly, which in 1974, says Knox, was 'pretty revolutionary'. 'It was exciting, but incredibly chaotic,' he remembers. 'It lived on the energy.'

The couple knew nothing about running a restaurant and had no money. 'I gave a cheque to Jules [Lavarack, the chef] to get food and he came back and said, "It didn't work [the cheque bounced]; I had to borrow the money from my mum." We took enough money that night to buy the food for the next day. No one got paid any money, of course, for the first two or three months. It was that sort of time. No one got paid at *The Melbourne Times*. You put money in; you didn't get money out.'

The buzz about this new restaurant doing food described as 'multicultural' or 'eclectic' was huge. Carlton and Fitzroy types jostled with the curious from Hawthorn and Armadale for a table at Mietta's every night. Knox and O'Donnell jug-

gled front-of-house. In the kitchen in the early days, a former librarian called Stephanie Alexander cooked. Later, a young man of Lebanese background called Greg Malouf came on board. Later still, the restaurant attracted a fellow called Jacques Reymond. ("Allo,' he announced himself to Knox on the telephone, 'I am zee French chef.')

It was, by all accounts, a wild ride. 'Tony was a very volatile person,' says Alexander, who left to start her own place after 10 months. 'It was easy to have screaming matches with him. I've had some humdingers with Tony. I seem to remember getting a letter of apology once.'

The outbursts were no big deal, Knox thought. 'It was considered perfectly reasonable table behaviour to have a good fight,' says Alexander. And the tension passed quickly. 'We shared a burgundy often,' she says. 'He was a very generous person. I now greet him with warm affection.'

Fred Chalupa, long-time owner of Il Vicolo in Carlton, worked as a chef at Mietta's for two years, watching Melbourne's great culinary high-wire act. 'Tony'd literally skip through the kitchen,' he says. 'He'd mumble. At times you couldn't understand him, but he got his message across.'

Chalupa watched O'Donnell and Knox put their respective skills to work. She was the calm one; Knox, despite his small stature, was the muscle. 'Mietta ran a good business, but sometimes you needed that extra step to get things back into line,' says Chalupa. 'And that's when Tony stepped in. When he hit the roof, he really hit the roof.'

The restaurant was their life. 'Mietta would wake up in the middle of the night and write notes to herself,' Knox remembers. Even the family life had to slot around restaurant hours. Knox and Pat Dowley's children, Katherine and David, would spend time at Mietta's. 'We grew up in restaurants,' says Katherine, now 36. 'It was exciting trying all the dishes.

Stephanie used to keep all the wishbones from the chickens for us, these huge piles of them.'

In 1978, Knox and O'Donnell joined her sisters, Patricia and Robin, to buy a run-down pub, the Queenscliff Hotel, which, recalls Knox, 'had been given a very severe touch of the Carlton and United Brewery moderns'. They restored the building, called it Mietta's, and turned it into a celebrated weekend-away hotel with a fine-dining restaurant.

The O'Donnell/Knox empire was growing, but, after five years of running the two places, the stress became too much. O'Donnell and Knox decided to sell out of Queenscliff, to sister Patricia.

The couple wanted to concentrate on the city, and in 1984 they had their biggest idea of all. They bought the ornate Victorian building in Alfred Place, once owned by the Naval and Military Club, and turned it into Melbourne's great salon of food, wine and entertainment. On a Friday night, queues stretched to Collins Street. It attracted prime ministers and poets, society matrons, pseuds, suits and artists, who would sit at its marble tables with their cocktails and watch Mietta in her signature black dress, standing still with her hands crossed.

But the stillness was an illusion. 'People would talk about Mietta in the lounge, "She stood there all night, never moved,"' Knox says. 'Little did they realise that between the times they'd glanced at her she'd done three circuits of the building, up the back stairs, into the kitchen, looking at the orders, then the dining room.'

Knox, trying to get people in and then out again to turn over the tables, played bad cop to the demure Mietta. There were many Basil Fawlty moments. 'I was a monster beyond belief; I was appalling,' Knox admits. 'I would torment people if they were sitting there not drinking. Or if they were kissing.

I would not tolerate any misbehaviour, like kissing. It was important to have a place where women could go by themselves and not be hassled. It was a whole behavioural change.'

Knox especially abhorred people he thought were pretentious. One night, remembers actor–writer Michael Veitch, a man wearing a fez and his raucous friends were annoying Knox, who 'thought they were a bunch of wankers'. Knox stormed up to them. 'Right, you're all out,' he yelled. 'Go on, get out.'

'Can we talk about this?' one retorted.

'No, just go,' Knox told them.

But barely had his temper flared up before he thought again. As the offending party was leaving, Knox offered conciliatory drinks and abject apologies. 'He would get annoyed with people for no discernible reason,' says Veitch. 'When you run a pub, you can't kick people out because you don't like someone's hat.'

'He had this belief,' remembers *Sunday Age* wine writer and former Mietta's waiter Ralph Kyte-Powell, 'that the customer isn't always right.'

Knox says, 'The amazing thing about Mietta was she didn't actually stop me. She'd always take the situation and work around it. So, my excesses were balanced by her amazing ability to deal with people. There was this impression that [the O'Donnell women] had me, the wild beast, locked up in this cage and every now and then they'd let me out to savage somebody.'

But Knox didn't always have it his way. One night, the writer Barry Dickins, in a unique moment wearing a tuxedo, was enjoying a boisterous celebration of the 50th birthday of his publicist friend Paul Taylor when, he says, Knox objected to one of their party, the painter Tony Hay. Dickins says it was because he was dressed in denims; Knox insists he was

annoyed because Hay was doing the famous Graham Kennedy crow-call ('Faaaaaaaark!'). Dickins says Knox kicked Hay, who fell off a chair. 'I felt that was unnecessary,' Dickins says. 'I grabbed Knox and took him into the kitchen and put him on a floured board and jokingly throttled him.'

Knox says that version is nearly right, except he claims he grabbed the chair and Hay fell off. 'Dickins had me by the throat in the middle of the lounge,' he says with a small chuckle. 'We were separated by staff.'

There'd be none of this male aggro for Mietta O'Donnell, though. With her beatific expression and powers of civility, she was an unlikely person to become a brand name. 'She never wanted to be front-of-house,' Knox says.

Despite her reserve, she had important social skills and a great memory for details about people. She excelled at putting together people she thought would be an interesting mix. As a couple, she and Knox were Melbourne's great facilitators. Mietta's ranked alongside the Melbourne and Australia clubs as a place of power. Bob Hawke held two pre-election dinners in the restaurant (the first in Fitzroy). Business deals were made and love affairs begun over Black Russians in the lounge.

But behind the glamorous facade and the crowds, the combination of the '87 stockmarket crash and relocation of many businesses to Sydney had taken the shine off the business. The introduction of the fringe benefits tax hurt, too. 'At lunch we did all the top businessmen in Australia,' Knox says. 'Come '87 – *boomph* – our lunchtime trade emigrated to Sydney.'

Knox was becoming 'bored and pissed off' with the direction of the business, so when an American friend suggested they do something in Harlem, they went to have a look. 'We were just, "Wow, unbelievable," ' says Knox. 'There was block after block of fantastic buildings.'

The idea was to launch a nightclub and performance space for New York's black performers, a market and talent base that Knox felt was untapped. 'I tend to have these wild ideas, and that was pretty wild.'

They borrowed around $1 million and set about building the nightclub. Melbourne entrepreneur John Pinder, who had started the Last Laugh in Collingwood, was a point-man in New York. Plans were drawn up, asbestos removed from the building, and a five-storey house in Harlem bought.

But as costs mounted and interests rates in Australia soared, Knox's 'midlife crisis' idea started to look like a disaster. After all the work, the club never opened. 'It was a mad, insane dream,' Knox says. 'We came out sadder and wiser.'

The disastrous New York experiment soaked up a small fortune, which was a fatal blow to Mietta's back home. By 1993, the dream was over, with Mietta's in receivership. The couple were forced to sell their New York house, a house in Parkville and the Mietta's building in the city. To continue running Mietta's, they leased the building from ex-Carlton footballer Mike Fitzpatrick.

Yet again, they had to reinvent themselves. 'We had to do something pretty dramatic to get back [to] trading profitably,' Knox says, 'and that was the entertainment'.

It had been O'Donnell's idea. She proposed a series of cultural events – small concerts, dramatic performances, readings, talks and opera – in the lounge. And it worked, with the likes of Kate Ceberano, opera singer Yvonne Kenny, comedian Wendy Harmer and writer David Malouf performing to full houses. The turnover was good, and it put them back on track.

But Knox and O'Donnell felt trapped by the demands of the restaurant; their customers had lives outside Mietta's, it seemed, but they didn't. They closed the doors on New Year's

Day 1996, tired and certainly not rich. Knox swore he'd never go back into the business. 'Ever read George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*? That's very precise, that description of the kitchen when there's this grey figure slumped there and suddenly a bell rings and everyone jumps up. That adrenaline. The service finishes and everyone's hysterical and it quietens down again. And that happens again two hours later.'

They were living in an apartment on a whole floor at 100 Collins Street and, for the first time in 20 years, were free of night-time commitments in a restaurant. 'It's a very strange life. Staff tend to become your extended family. The outside world is filtered and you live quite a claustrophobic existence.' For the first time in two decades, they could watch the television shows they'd heard everyone talking about.

After long-running battles with the food critics of Melbourne who they believed often missed the point of the dining experience – Mietta once denied entry to *The Age*'s restaurant critics Claude Forell and Rita Erlich – the couple decided to launch their own restaurant guide as well as a website. It meant they could indulge their passion for travelling and live without the worry of a restaurant hanging over their heads.

But the attention to detail never wavered. 'One night we sat in a Richmond restaurant and Mietta and Tony were dissecting a crème caramel like it was a frog in a Year 10 biology class,' remembers Michael Veitch, who contributed to three editions of the guide.

These were good years in many respects, but in 1998 tragedy struck when Knox's 28-year-old son, David, who had struggled for several years with heroin addiction, died from an overdose.

Now, Knox says he had not known how to deal with David's

problem, and feels sadness about his failure to act more decisively. 'I'm sure we could have done more for him. We lived a very enclosed life.'

Knox knew that when David rang it was a cry for help, but he didn't know how to respond. 'I'm really bad at helping other people,' he admits. 'It was very difficult. [Heroin addiction] is also a life outside of my generation's experience. There was grog, but we didn't know how to accommodate [heroin problems].'

David did move in with his father and Mietta for six months. 'It was a difficult time for everybody,' Knox remembers.

'Tony was there for David in his own way,' Patricia O'Donnell says. 'Tony and Mietta gave David jobs.' But Knox was sometimes at a loss outside the world of hospitality. 'I remember Tony ringing up late one night when David had had an accident on his bike. He said, "I've got David, what am I to do with him?" '

Since losing Mietta, Tony Knox has been rebuilding his life out of the public eye. He still travels around Australia updating his restaurant guide. Always a keen motorbike rider – he and O'Donnell once rode to Sydney on his bike – last year he broke four ribs and punctured a lung when he 'went over the handlebars'. He spent a week in hospital. Then, while edging in front of a stationary car at a set of traffic lights, the annoyed driver edged forwards and pushed him off the bike. 'I felt there was a message there,' Knox says. He sold the bike soon after.

He is still single ('These things take a while,' he says) and helps his daughter Katherine in the Charles Street Bar in Seddon, which they co-own. 'I've become the chef in the restaurant,' he says. 'Not because of some long-undiscovered talent, but because I'm awfully cheap.'

Of that terrible day in 2001, Patricia O'Donnell says, 'I

think he feels terribly guilty. It's an emotional thing, it's not a reality thing. When you're in a situation that has produced intolerable consequences, you fixate on what might have happened.'

Does Knox agree that he feels the burden of guilt? 'No,' he says bluntly. 'I don't think that's part of it.'

Greg Malouf sometimes visits Knox at his new bar, just as Knox and O'Donnell used to visit Malouf at O'Connells, the South Melbourne pub he helped transform with his Middle Eastern cooking.

'I don't know what's going on in his mind,' Malouf says. 'He can be a difficult man to talk to. But over the past two years he has opened up a little. He may have turned a tiny corner.'

*July 2004*

*This is the only time Tony Knox has decided to speak about the tragic day when the love of his life, Mietta O'Donnell, died. He continues to work with his daughter in the bar they co-own in Seddon, Melbourne.*

Highly respected *Age* journalist Peter Wilmoth is known for writing penetrating and insightful profiles of some of Australia's most intriguing characters. For twenty-five years he has been skilfully drawing out the famous and infamous, and, at last, many of his most acclaimed pieces appear together in one volume.

In *Up Close*, Wilmoth takes a personal look at 28 Australians who are renowned as entertainers, politicians, artists and heroes, as well as ordinary people who have found themselves in extraordinary circumstances – from Bali bombing survivor Hanabeth Luke, to Andrew Denton, Peter Costello, Jana Wendt, Layne Beachley, Neil Finn and Peter Carey. Sympathetic, yet unflinchingly honest, these profiles expose the human beings behind the public masks and reveal them in all their complexity.

***Up Close* is about amazing lives that have variously been touched by controversy, joy, tragedy, and the ups and downs of fame. It is riveting, and often surprising, reading.**

MACMILLAN
**Pan Macmillan Australia**

Cover design: Darian Causby/Highway 51 Design Works

NON-FICTION
www.panmacmillan.com.au

AUST. RRP $30.00 inc GST
ISBN 1-4050-3657-5
9 781405 036573